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# Maurice Blondel's Philosophy of Action

BY

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The Graham Kenan Fellowship was founded by Mrs. Sarah G. Kenan in memory of her husband, Mr. Graham Kenan. The fund yields \$1,500.00 yearly. This amount is to be used to stimulate higher excellence in the work of students in the University. Mr. Kenan's life as a student and a citizen was an unusual life. He loved to see the true and the right prevail. "The best is none too good", was a saying of his. It is the desire of Mrs. Kenan and the Department of Philosophy that this philosophy of his should be emphasized. Therefore the policy will be to work for those things that are helpful and possess value in themselves.

In harmony with this policy we are offering a study of the *Philosophy of Maurice Blondel*. Blondel is probably the most important French philosopher since Descartes. He is not known among American students as he deserves. We feel that this monograph will bring him before us. The work is well done. Mrs. Katherine Gilbert is expert in French and Philosophy. She holds the doctorate in Philosophy from Cornell University and has done valuable work for *The Philosophical Review* and the *Philosophical Society*. Mrs. Gilbert remains on the Fellowship and hopes to do something even better for next year.

Department of Philosophy.

H. H. WILLIAMS.

June, 1924.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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	PAGE
Preface .....	-
CHAPTER I	
Aim and Method of the Philosophy of Action.....	7
CHAPTER II	
Summary of the Dialectic of Action.....	15
CHAPTER III	
Continuation of the Summary of the Dialectic.....	33
CHAPTER IV	
Action and the Will.....	47
CHAPTER V	
The Notional and the Real Intelligence.....	64
CHAPTER VI	
The Interpretation of Religion.....	80





## PREFACE

The purpose of this monograph is to introduce to American philosophers and to estimate critically the work of the French philosopher Maurice Blondel. His writings have commanded such attention in Europe that thinkers on this side the water can scarcely neglect him without suspicion of parochialism. Opinions will vary in this country, as they vary in his own, regarding the conclusiveness of his arguments and the propriety of his method, but it would seem to be a mere matter of liberal philosophical education to recognize the name and place of a philosopher whose influence has already been as impressive as has Blondel's. His scholarly fame began with the publication of his thesis in November, 1893. The entire edition was exhausted in a year and a quarter, and—the author not wishing to reissue in the time that has thus far been his to command—the work has been eagerly sought for in any available place and at almost any price. The interest in this volume, *L'Action*, has led to critical discussions of its import in lectures, articles, and dissertations beyond the borders of France, in Italy, Germany, England, Belgium, Switzerland, and Poland. Among the many well-known philosophers who have occupied themselves with his ideas may be mentioned Eucken, Lasson, Charles Werner, Gentile, and Baron Friedrich von Hügel. Chroniclers of contemporary movements in philosophy and religion have not hesitated to use strong terms in describing his influence even when they have not shared his point of view. Archdeacon A. L. Lilley, recognized English historian of the Modernist Movement, calls Blondel's philosophy of action a "profound contribution to the religious apologetic of our time";<sup>1</sup> he also says that Blondel "has . . . done as much as any man of his time to demonstrate the merely representative character of dogma, to establish alike the distinction and the connection between the reality lived and felt and the reality thought."<sup>2</sup> Parodi in *La philosophie Contemporaine en France*

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<sup>1</sup>*Modernism, A Record and Review*, New York, Scribner's Sons, 1908, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 116.

names him "the most brilliant and profound of the disciples of Ollé-Laprune."<sup>1</sup> Ruggiero in his summary of all modern philosophy says: "Maurice Blondel is the thinker who has summed up all the scattered tendencies of the philosophy of action or volition and has developed them to a very high speculative level."<sup>2</sup> Ruggiero also notes the intimate connection of Blondel with Modernism by referring to him as "the spiritual father"<sup>3</sup> of that movement. These tributes are representative of the general esteem and even admiration with which he is regarded by European scholars, even by those who demur from his conclusions.

As a purely speculative thinker, Blondel belongs to the so-called 'spiritualist' school of contemporary French philosophy. Starting with Maine de Biran, a group of thoughtful and imaginative writers—Ravaisson, Lachelier, Boutroux, Fouillée, Bergson, Le Roy—have reacted in distinctive ways against the rationalistic fashion of thought which had prevailed before them. They were concerned to do justice to the inner reality of things and the dynamic aspect of all life. Positivism and phenomenalism as well as a rationalistic metaphysic had, they conceived, cut off but a fragment—and that the less significant half—of the nature of things to analyze and interpret, and in leaning heavily on the facts of spontaneity and creation, they believed themselves to be doing late justice to a misrepresented and undervalued universe. This motive is prominent in the writing of Blondel. He is never weary of condemning the sterility of all types of reflection which do not give 'action' a foremost place. Like Maine de Biran he aims at bringing out what is really active in us—self-consciousness; like Ravaisson, he teaches that in order to understand, one must love, that it is the heart in the widest sense of the term that instructs and judges, and that a true philosophy only serves to help the wise to regain by great labor the heights already possessed by the humble and unlearned. Among those prominent in the history of philosophy he acknowledges

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<sup>1</sup> Paris, Félix Alcan, 1919, p. 302.

<sup>2</sup> Guido de Ruggiero, *Modern Philosophy*, Trans. Hannay & Collingwood, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1921, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

full sympathy only with Saint Augustine, Pascal and Newman—a suggestive selection. The mention of these names as his chief spiritual kindred prepares us to understand that, while he is a philosopher, he is still more a defender of the faith; and that while he is a member of the spiritualist group, he uses the engines of that army in a particular service—the service of the Church.

By using new and vital conceptions in this special service Blondel does not, however—as Americans unacquainted with the tolerance and speculative depth of Modernism might rashly assume—contract their content. By applying the conceptions of a concrete philosophy, the interdependence of matter and form, of action and passion, of physical and psychical, to the matter of fact supplied by the dogmas and ritual of an embodied tradition, Blondel achieves a result analogous to that obtained by giving philosophy a physical body and manifestation in art or politics. He makes abstract ideas come alive and impress the imagination. A religious movement whose watchword has been, "All truth is orthodox", could scarcely be intellectually blighting; and Blondel has been concerned to demonstrate that a philosophy which could readily absorb the metaphors of dogma, could not be empty.

As apologetic, the philosophy of Modernism, which is essentially the philosophy of Blondel, his master Ollé-Laprune, his friend and disciple Laberthonnière, and of Loisy and Le Roy, in France, has been popularly opposed to Neo-Thomism. The authorities of the Catholic Church fancied the teachings of the new school subversive of the fundamentals of Catholic faith, and erected in direct opposition to them a restatement of the scholastic doctrines of St. Thomas. They interpreted Modernism not in the sense of its adherents as the life of truth as expressed by the church, but as "an immoderate love of the novel" and as having its source in the revolutionary sentimentality of Rousseau. They therefore found it necessary to excommunicate many of the leaders of the movement. The rumor was circulated<sup>1</sup> that Blondel himself shared in the Pope's displeasure, and that the reason

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<sup>1</sup> The misstatement is made in Parodi, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

for a failure to republish *L'Action* was the Pope's interdiction. This rumor in regard to Blondel is, however, false. The truth is that, as he conceives of *L'Action* as but one member in a series of three proposed volumes, he did not care to republish by fragments. It is true that there has been much adverse criticism of the purport of the philosophy of immanence—as Blondel's view is often called—in the orthodox journals. An echo of the conflict may be found in articles originally written by Blondel for *Annales de philosophie Chrétienne*, 1909-1910, signed 'Testis'. But when the Archbishop of Aix was moved by the attack on Blondel to inquire of the Pope what he thought of the assailed metaphysic, the Pope replied: "I am sure of his (Blondel's) orthodoxy, and I charge you to tell him so."<sup>1</sup> Whether this immunity is due to the rare flexibility of Blondel's thought and manner of presentation, or whether it is due to a fundamental, though unconscious, compromise of intellectual position with regard to such matters as Biblical criticism and the authority of the church, the writer of this monograph is unable to say. She is, however, convinced of the complete sincerity of Blondel's performance, and bears willing testimony to the feeling of insight and growth that comes from close study of the philosophy of action.

The chief works of Maurice Blondel are as follows:

*L'Unité intellectuelle et morale de la France*, in *Annales de la Philosophie Chrétienne*, 1892.

*L'Action, essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique*, 1893.

*De vinculo substantiali et de substantia composita apud Leibnitium*, 1893.

*Lettres sur les exigences de la pensée contemporaine en matière d'apologétique et sur la méthode de la philosophie dans l'étude du problème religieux*, 1896.

*Histoire et dogme, les lacunes philosophiques de l'exégèse moderne*, 1904.

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<sup>1</sup> These personal facts are from a letter of M. Blondel's.

*La Psychologie dramatique du mystère de la passion à Oberammergau*, 1900.

*Le Procès de l'Intelligence*, 1922.

Léon Ollé-Laprune. *L'Achèvement et l'Avenir de son oeuvre*, 1923.

Also articles in various journals: la Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale, Annales de philosophie Chrétienne, Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie, etc. For a complete bibliography see *La Filosofia dell'Azione e il Pragmatismo*, by Olga Arcuno, Vallecchi, Florence, 1924, pp. 173-176.

The original suggestion of the subject of this study came from Professor Horace Williams, of the University of North Carolina, whose philosophical instinct revealed to him the possible fruitfulness of such an investigation. From beginning to end his interest and encouragement have never failed. I am indebted to Dr. Harold Smart of the same University for a careful reading of the manuscript and suggestion in detail. From M. André Lalande of the Sorbonne I have received valuable comments on the external fortunes of the philosophy of action, and he has further had the kindness to forward to me exact information obtained directly from M. Blondel himself.



## CHAPTER I

### AIM AND METHOD OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION

"If I am not what I will to be—not with my lips or in mere design or conception, but with all my heart and all my strength and in all my acts—I am nothing at all."<sup>1</sup> Maurice Blondel's philosophy of action may be said to be the elaboration and proof of this assertion. The categorical tone of the statement—"here or nowhere is reality"—and the suggestion of a moral or even a religious creed point truly to the deeply serious temper and synoptic method of his whole work. The intent is to ask the most general and fundamental questions that philosophy conceives, and to ask them with an ultimately practical purpose. "The rôle of philosophy," he says, "is radically to restore man's will."<sup>2</sup> Philosophy could not be practically helpful if she were not free; but neither is she free if she is not helpful: *non adjutrix nisi libera; non libera nisi adjutrix philosophia*. Philosophy and religion are separate kingdoms of the human spirit and the methods of each must be preserved intact and not violated; but the definition of boundaries is for the sake of coöperation. Philosophy which ends in presumptuous self-sufficiency, and fails to recognize its obligations to action, is imperfect as philosophy.

There is, however, an objection to describing Blondel's philosophy as ethical or religious, in that those terms sometimes connote a special type of philosophical inquiry to be distinguished from scientific or technical researches in the same field. In choosing for his subject the meaning of life and of the human will, he does not suppose himself to have selected one of various possibilities open to a systematic philosopher, nor that he has set himself a task suited to a particular philosophical tempera-

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<sup>1</sup> *L'Action*, *Essai d'une Critique de la Vie et d'une Science de la Pratique*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1893, p. xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393. Cf. Milton, *Of Education*: "The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright."



ment. He has taken, he believes, the logically prior subject for his own, and the true philosophy—one might almost say, philosophy, without otherwise limiting the word—will presumably build itself up under his hands in confirmation of the right beginning. His Critique of Life rests, in his opinion, upon no moral postulate nor intellectual datum. "This is, therefore, not *one* particular question analogous to any other which presents itself to us. It is *the* question without which no other exists. It is so primary that any previous concession would be a *petitio*."<sup>1</sup>

For another reason it might prove to be unfair to call Blondel's philosophy 'ethical.' Not only is his ethical interest identical in his opinion with the most universal of human considerations, but it is susceptible of as rigidly objective determination as any isolable fact of external nature. Now it is sometimes assumed that what belongs to the moral life is not amenable to exact treatment, but is matter of opinion or appreciation. Upon this view ethical values may be registered indeed by the mind and disposed in some sort of empirical scheme, but they can scarcely be intellectually demonstrated in the same sense as scientific propositions. If good and evil are the objects of feeling or instinct, then moral distinctions are inextricably involved with the indefinables of temperament and subjective liking and dislike. Blondel does not blur the distinction between the measurable phenomena which are the material of physical science and the inner life of spirit. If anything, he exaggerates the distinction. But he believes that there are objective and exact methods for all types of subject-matter, and to his mind the orderly manipulation of material is as essential as the primacy of interest. He means to leave no room for doubt, as he means to leave no previous question. The intellect is to be constrained by indubitable evidence and deduction.

It is worth while to emphasize Blondel's use of intellectual methods because the title of his chief work and the prominence of a voluntaristic and mystic strain in his philosophy have blinded critics to his zeal for science and demonstration. Parodi

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xxi, xxii.

offers a not very flattering explanation of the intellectual element in Blondel. He remarks that since all orthodox theology issues from St. Thomas, the faithful of the church cannot deny the rights of the intellect except at their peril, and that it is natural, therefore, that our Catholic philosopher should never explicitly sacrifice intelligence to intuition.<sup>1</sup> But Lalande notices the intellectual element without feeling it necessary to account for it on any unphilosophical ground. In a recent summary of a year's achievement in French philosophy he says: "M. Maurice Blondel . . . wrote, this last year, a scholarly little book called *Le Procès de l'intelligence*. In it he clearly separates his doctrine from that of the pragmatists. He might well take as a motto for the book the words of Saint Augustine as cited on the final page—*Intellectum valde ama*."<sup>2</sup> Blondel himself describes the object of that little study as the demonstration that the dialectic of real knowledge (another term for the science of action), however different it may be from a logic of concepts, is compatible with precise method and an appropriate type of clearness.<sup>3</sup>

The question then arises as to what is the precise intellectual method and the appropriate type of clearness of Blondel's dialectic. A 'real dialectic' is different from conceptual logic, he says. It is the development of a real content and not a series of static representations of reality. And yet, although he considers the quality of rationalism—the systematic treatment of concepts—stultifying to philosophy, and is likely to use that term when he is lamenting the attribute which has hitherto made philosophy ghostly and ineffectual, his own work shows traces of it. His concern to establish an invulnerable starting-point as did all the early rationalists, and his tendency to emphasize formal implication in the development of the dialectic, establish without question, it seems to me, a degree of kinship with Descartes and his school. But it is as 'science' in some sense opposed to ra-

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<sup>1</sup> *La Philosophie Contemporaine en France*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1919, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> *The Philosophical Review*, XXXI, 6, pp. 552, 553.

<sup>3</sup> *Le Procès de L'Intelligence*, Bloud & Gay, Paris, 1922, p. 248.

tionalism that he chooses to have his dialectic figure. It is therefore necessary to ask exactly what the word 'science' implies to Blondel.

The scientific method of the 'philosophy of action' has two parts: the part it shares with all sciences, and the part that is peculiar to this specific science of practice. Blondel sets himself to satisfy all the requirements of scientific method in general, and then to particularize them and to add such individual elements as are needed in his own case. Now he will emphasize the likeness of the science in hand to mathematics or chemistry; now he will accentuate the difference between it and all other sciences. But the specific quality does not free it from any of the wider obligations of science; rather its special character adds obligations, so that in the end the universality and rigor of Blondel's philosophical science are supreme.

Like any science, then, this one presupposes a disinterested frame of mind. The investigation must start without any *parti pris*. Nothing can be taken for granted: no fact, principle, or duty. The experimenter must enter as an intimate accomplice into the most diverse ethical attitudes, take them seriously for the time being, and allow them to work out their own consequences as freely as chemical elements combine in exemplification of natural law. He must entertain mutually destructive hypotheses as if they were all equally possible, share prejudices as if they were legitimate, take error for truth, base passion for noble emotion, and assume with every philosopher that his particular ethical system can embrace the infinite. The equal eye of science looks with the same favor on folly and extravagance and on virtue and right reason. So characteristic of the scientific attitude is this objectivity that the word 'scientific,' when not otherwise qualified, is often taken to mean impartial.

Blondel makes ingenious use of this principle of disinterestedness in his defense of the supernatural. The dogma of the supernatural is unscientifically condemned, he declares. For the mysteries and spirit of other faiths—of Buddhism, for example—are investigated by students of comparative religion. And,

he says, "Strange, indeed, if it were scientific to examine the letter and spirit of all the cults save one. It has not been thought to be beyond the competence of philosophy to criticize (and the criticism has actually been made) all forms of superstition and all the fictions invented by man to create the illusion of achievement in action. Why then should it be beyond the jurisdiction of philosophy to consider whether there is any form of religion which escapes these criticisms and upon which it can take no hold?"<sup>1</sup> Less respect is accorded the hypothesis of the supernatural, he contends, than is given to Sanskrit texts and Chinese costumes. One cannot exclude by science what has never been examined by science.

General scientific method means for Blondel, in the second place, the extraction of an essence or 'common element,' during the process of experimentation, from the indefinite number of rival hypotheses. The scientist starts, it seems, at the termini of many lines which diverge from a common center, and he works his way in along these 'rays' to their single source. This source or essence is the truth which the experimenter seeks. A veritable science of action is built up by eliminating the variable element in voluntary decisions and penetrating to a core of sameness, a common *élan*. The problem is to "determine the common element in every exercise of liberty, and to seize under the arbitrary and variable, the necessary and inevitable remainder."<sup>2</sup> Here Blondel obviously agrees with the interpretation of scientific method as essentially abstraction: the eliciting of the simple from the complex, the regular and orderly from the capricious. The rule for the experiment is, then, to start with the utmost variety and issue with perfect unity.

Thus far Blondel's theory of method is of general application. But it is a mistake to think that all sciences must be throughout of the same pattern. This mistaken demand for uniformity in science has been the root of the false idea that ethical material is not subject to law. Ethical laws are *sui generis*

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<sup>1</sup> *L'Action*, p. 391.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

in so far as the content of ethics is unique. A science degenerates into a pseudo-science if the idiosyncrasy of matter is not regarded; such is a descriptive psychology which treats the phenomena of consciousness as facts instead of as acts.<sup>1</sup> "Sociology is scientific only if it is different from other sciences,"<sup>2</sup> that is, only if sociological laws are adapted to the concrete manifestations of the social will. The third characteristic of Blondel's method pertains, then, to the distinctive quality of the life of practice.

All sciences involve the observation of a series of connected events, but the science of action is distinguished from the others in that the subject and object of the observation must be identical. Here the investigator trusts a hypothesis which he proposes to test in his own experience; and this is the advantage of his position: that he himself has the experience which he interprets. He must be at once laboratory, changing substance, and observer; verification of results can only be had by giving up one's own person for vital analysis. "It is impossible to make this experiment by procuration.... Amusing fellows—these theorists of practice who observe, deduce, discuss, and legislate about what they never do. The chemist does not pretend to make water without hydrogen and oxygen. I do not pretend to know and prove, assert and evaluate man's destiny without delivering to the crucible all the humanity I have in me. This organism of flesh, appetites, desires and thoughts, whose obscure workings I feel perpetually within me, is a living laboratory, and it is out of it that my science of life must first arise. Ordinarily all the deductions of moralists about the rich facts of the ethical and social life are artificial, narrow, and thin. Let us act, and leave them their alchemy."<sup>3</sup>

In this specific quality is the solution, if there be any, of the paradox in Blondel's methodological aim. In one breath he speaks of the supreme rigor and universality of his science and

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

symbolizes an act of free will by an algebraic formula; in the next he refers to his doctrine as one which "puts into words the nourishing grain of things, comes from life and goes to life."<sup>1</sup> He represents his philosophy as universally valid and coercive to the understanding; but he also represents it as 'humanism' and therefore as a spiritual art. At times he assimilates his theory so closely to life that it almost ceases to be theory at all. It not only bears 'being' in it, but it is itself a reality, "via, veritas, vita, et ens." There seems always to be present to his mind the distinction between gray theory and the green and golden tree of life; and he is always insisting that a right knowledge of things involves not *savoir pur*, but *savoir-vivre* and *savoir-faire*. But he is conscious of the conventional associations of ethical humanism with practical empiricism, the basing of the art of living on some merely intuited ideal or upon 'literary' culture. To this notion of humanism he is as opposed as the driest analyzer of the emotions; it is sentimental and superficial. The humanism which his metaphysics finally purports to be is more strenuously examined and argued, he believes, than any ordinary critical or speculative system.

He is able to hold these two apparently contradictory phases of his thought together because he can say that an ascetic life is true science and sacrifice is a crucial experiment. The agent and instrument of proof for him is the sincere and generous will. The exceptional inclusiveness of Blondel's philosophical aim follows then from his employment in a scientific spirit of functions and experiences which are commonly regarded as extra-scientific. He can even claim a superiority for his 'science' because tests are more exacting and reasoning more subtle in a process in which a whole man is put to the proof than in one in which a single abstraction is analyzed. How successful Blondel is in combining these ordinarily dissociated ideals of the humanities and the sciences we are later to inquire. He is at least sensitive to different types of value. He himself, following Pascal, lays

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<sup>1</sup> *Léon Ollé-Laprune*, Bloud & Gay, Paris, 1923, p. 64.

it down as a principle of criticism that any author is best understood by reconciling his apparently contradictory theses.<sup>1</sup> It is only fair that Blondel should himself enjoy those advantages of interpretation which he believes in granting to others.

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<sup>1</sup> *Rev. de Métaphysique et de Morale*, XXX, 2; p. 137.

## CHAPTER II

### SUMMARY OF THE DIALECTIC OF ACTION<sup>1</sup>

It would be folly to begin a thorough search for the meaning of life or, as it may otherwise be described, the nature of action, if human life has no meaning beyond its surface-play. "There are no more insoluble problems than those that do not exist."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps life is nothing but chaos, and the effort to find unity there foredoomed to failure. This is the cynical view of a school of esthetes who play with life as if it were an amusing farce. They try all attitudes—Voltaire's scepticism, Roman Catholicism, Indian cults—but always with a sophisticated smile, for in their hearts they believe that all living and acting is empty form. In their opinion any fixed conviction, consistent attitude, or definite affirmation introduces a false rigidity into life and thought. There is nothing true, they say, but eternal change; and the only way to match oneself with life is to shift like an acrobat from posture to posture. All philosophies are at bottom alike: scepticism is dogmatism; optimism is pessimism. He who can tell the color of the throat of a pigeon, says our dilettante, can tell the significance of human life.

The esthete takes the soul out of action, for he reduces it to mere external and mechanical motion; he kills action, for by the multiplication and dissociation of sensations, he realizes death in life. In a sense, such a person does not act or think or exist at all; he merely has a succession of experiences of nullity. Yet however disorganized his experience and however negative and destructive his philosophy, he is unable to rid either his practice or theory of all positive content; there is a method in his very madness. The nothingness of life is to him a 'truth of being,' an almost hidden creed which he acknowledges in spite of himself. Now when we have laid bare in his consciousness

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<sup>1</sup> This and the succeeding chapter follow, without criticism or comment, the course of Blondel's argument in his principal constructive work, *L'Action*. In these chapters Blondel virtually speaks for himself.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action*, p. 1.



any truth or acknowledged creed, however paradoxical its form may be, we have discovered the fatal logical weakness in the point of view of the dilettante and the reason for the instability of the first moment of the dialectic of action.

Exactly what is the positive implication in this Protean philosophy of change and nothingness? The element of self-consciousness in such a practical scepticism forces it out of itself into an affirmation of something. To know that one wishes nothing is after all to be aware of a positive wish—the desire for nothing. The mere sanctioning of an absence of all will implies the notion of a will which has an affirmative and constructive set toward self-abnegation. *Nolo velle* = *Volo nolle*.

If this seems too formal a mode of exposing the fallacy in dilettantism, there is a more concrete way of bringing to light the contradiction in the attitude. The sophist under consideration will be tolerant of all ways and opinions except the attitude of intolerance. The essence of intolerance is the conviction that a single position is necessary, and that is the one position that our sceptic cannot admit in his elastic theory. In the face of aggressive intolerance he takes on a positive attitude of self-defense and of definite disapproval of the attitude opposed to his own. He now assembles all his powers and gathers them into a common offensive and defensive force. At last he exhibits a solid center and stands for something. He becomes militant in defending universal neutrality.

In the logical analysis of the esthete's way of life and hidden assumptions we have come unawares upon a fundamental philosophical distinction, one which persists throughout the dialectic and determines the main trend of its course. A split appears in his practical 'set', revealing a deeper unity underneath the superficial diffusion. All will, like the esthete's will, has these two aspects: a profound, steady, single, primitive *élan*, a clear stream flowing underground as it were, and the confusion of the manifold detail of the will's course, the sum of empirical desires which seem to exhibit but little coherency and to tend nowhere in particular. Our destiny as human beings depends on

the interaction of these two wills,—the *volonté voulante* and the *volonté voulue*. The profound will, the *volonté voulante*, contains more reality and is the greater force of the two. It exerts an ever-increasing pressure on the manifest will, the *volonté voulue*, to join with it. But the manifest will, on its side, has advantages of its own which prevent the final triumph of the hidden will until after the long and difficult road of the dialectic has been traversed.

These two wills of the dilettante may be translated into ethical terms. In so far as he allows expression to the real meaning of life, and thus trusts to the guidance of his deeper impulses, he frankly wills himself,—his own preservation and satisfaction. This is the grossest egoism, but it has the vital germ of truth in it, because it is sincere. Underneath the flitting from sweet to sweet, the tasting and the symbolism, the contortions and elusiveness, is a genuine substratum of reality and truth, the import of which is self-worship. But combined with the sincere autolatry of the esthete, constituting in its ethical aspect the second moment of his double nature, is the abasement of self before any object that appears. He at once loves himself more than all the world, and any trifling thing the world offers, better than himself. He tries to lose himself in the offerings of chance and change in order to satisfy himself. This is the expression of the phenomenal aspect of a mere floater's impulses, *volonté voulue*, the will actualized in things and events.

Thus the attempt to deny the very existence of the philosophical problem by dissipating intellectual identity in esthetic variety fails. Life has some meaning, however difficult it may be to define it. Any wholesale scepticism is self-destructive, and leaves the mind standing in its integrity, committed to the search for the truth of things. Now the effort to gather the significance of life into some single formula results in the first instance in metaphysical pessimism. Life, we now say, has indeed a meaning which the mind of man can comprehend, but that meaning is, unfortunately, positively negative. Better not to be at all, than so to be; for the first inclusive glance at the world yields the

facts of universal suffering, treachery, and vanity. It shows that those who appear happy are often at heart the saddest. "Praise the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive;" for "all is travail and vexation of spirit." No one is secure, no one is happy, no one is good.

In the conclusions of pessimism, the testimony of common observation, of positive science, and of critical metaphysics concur. Science reduces all the natural instincts and desires to abstractions, and analyzes away the personal self and the glory of its destiny. Courage becomes a mere configuration of the cortex and love a pathological process. Metaphysics assembles the specific findings of experience and science, and generalizes them into the ultimate unreality of all apparent existence. The deepest philosophical truth is that 'nothingness is good, it is; being is bad, it is not.' The goal of finite endeavor should be detachment from the empirical will, and desire for the salvation of annihilation. Thus the will may become disengaged from the delusive charms of particular things, turn upon itself, and destroy itself. When a man longs for nothingness with all the force and sincerity of his will, as for an assured refuge, a scientific verity, and the uttermost word of metaphysical truth, then, says the philosophical pessimist, the problem of life and action is solved.

But pessimism cannot logically maintain itself. Inconsistent in its use of the terms 'being' and 'willing', it is really two contradictory attitudes masquerading as a single consistent one. The pessimism is genuine in so far as it applies to the desire for empirical satisfactions and is identical with a dallying with ephemeral pleasures; but the alleged pessimism is really a covert optimism when the will in question is the less obvious yearning toward the ultimate impersonal Reality. One type of striving is to be crushed only that another may be nourished. And parallel to the two wills are the two kinds of being that are to be denied and asserted, respectively. The reality which consists of partial and temporal existences resolves itself, for the pessimist, into nothingness, while another Reality, looming vaguely behind the first, and serving as a standard by which the first is discredited,

is to be embraced. A pure absence of being can neither be thought nor desired, and the effort to establish a constructive philosophy of nothingness loses itself in these conflicting conceptions.

The next task of the dialectic is to determine the content of that residue of constructive meaning deposited by pessimism. What is the least meaning that the will can affirm? The dialectic of action begins its positive career with the bare assertion: There is something. Thus much of universal truth is secure because all attempts to deny it fail, and leave it standing. Even in the posture of indifference or in the sweeping denial of value, a will to some kind of being lies concealed. The simple assertion of something—formal and empty as it seems—is a seed out of which eventually will issue the comprehensive life of spirit with its infinite detail and far-reaching implications. One needs nothing more than this almost foolish-seeming proposition to start the process which, by devious ways and through many stages, brings reflection at last to the secret meaning of the world and man's destiny. The progress of action toward its essence and consummation may be called its phenomenology, and the phenomenology falls naturally into five parts. The five steps are: 1, from sense-experience to subjective science; 2, from the threshold of consciousness to volition; 3, from intentional effort to the first expression of action in the external world; 4, from individual to social action; 5, from social to superstitious action.

The first stage of the phenomenology deals with the interpretation of life given in sense-experience and in the organization of immediate impressions in positive science, positive science taken to include the physical and mathematical sciences. We look about us, and by virtue of our mere organs of sight and hearing, touch and taste, we understand surrounding objects well enough to relate them to each other and conduct our lives passably well in their presence. It might, then, seem over-subtle to press the interpretation of reality further than the indications of these data of common experience. And it is doubtless true that reason would rest here, in the kingdom of the senses, if sense-experience did not contradict itself. But analysis

is forced to birth by the conflicts in the most naïve of our judgments. What I sense a thing to be, I take for my own private incommunicable experience, a unique feeling, and at the same time—so inconsistent is the uncriticised perception of objects—for the very thing itself, universally valid as it appears to me, indeed, such that my sensing makes no difference to it. The judgment: 'I am that which I feel at the moment when I feel it,' collides with the contemporaneous judgment: 'I feel what is.' The conflict has to be resolved; for obviously a thing cannot be at once wholly subjective and wholly objective; and in this necessity for conciliation science arises. For centuries the discussion about the relation of the real to the perceived object took the form of defining the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, but science has now reshaped this distinction into the sounder one between the accounts given of reality by the natural and mathematical sciences, respectively.

According to the old notion, mathematics was an ideal construction, not constitutive of experience or immanent in nature. The gap between the calculable and the sensible seemed to be impassable. But now the aspiration of the natural sciences toward a mathematization of their empirical results is interpreted as the demand for greater objectivity and solidity, that is, toward a fuller reality, the implication being that more substance inheres in the mathematical formula than in what the senses discover. On the other hand, mathematics tries to particularize and apply itself by furnishing equations which shall precisely express the nature of concrete things. The theory suggested by this *rapprochement* of the two kinds of science is that the whole truth lies in their combined accounts. The physical and mathematical sciences seem to supplement each other and together adequately to match man's sense of wonder. But although the two types of science coöperate and carry conviction by their practical fruitfulness, a logical examination of their principles and pretensions shows that they set a problem which they do not solve. The fact of their coöperation is a mystery, even though a fact. Theory can never bridge the hiatus that separates them. They are at once incoherent and supplementary, and that is a funda-

mental contradiction. The incoherence is the necessary consequence of the radical distinction in the type of elements with which they build. Mathematics works with abstract uniformities, points, lines, pure continua, supposing for the sake of the argument that such artifacts are true existents and that an analysis of reality, carried through to the limit, would reveal them as actual. Mathematics sets forth with these absolutely homogeneous elements as given, although in truth they never have been and never can be objects of direct perception. The elements of the natural sciences, on the other hand, are real, for physical science starts from the qualitative wholes and concrete things of sense-perception. But as such, that is, as utterly unique and heterogeneous facts, these data never pass over wholly into formulae. Thus the application of the two kinds of science to each other can never be more than an approximation and a fiction, however practically convenient. The version of man and nature furnished by positivism, which is the sum-total of the findings of the sciences turned into a philosophy, rests upon the constant association of two irreducible orders, the principle of whose co-operation is an arbitrary reciprocal symbolism justified in practice, but never fully in theory. But how is it that a combination of the sciences can work, if the combination is unintelligible? Some foreign element which reason does not reckon with or account for must enter into the functioning of science and explain its practical success. There is an X which is the essential, overlooked in theory, of scientific operations. This X, the tacit postulate of science and the force which mediates between nature and the world of number, is the subjective human act. The power of action brings together incompatible orders and accomplishes the miracle of profitable union. Man's will lives and moves before science and after science, and is its enveloping and sustaining medium.

There is the irony of fate in this revealed dependence of positive science upon something subjective. The subjective, with its connotation of caprice and arbitrariness, is the thing most abhorred by the exact observers of natural processes and by mathematicians. They fancy themselves unable to proceed until

after all subjective interference is eliminated. The disclosure, then, that nothing is done in science, no explanation is achieved, no whole constituted, unless a human act supervenes upon the lifeless data, is revolutionary in its effect upon a total interpretation of life. The attention of the philosopher must now be directed toward the analysis of this new important phenomenon, and so the second stage of the phenomenology must be occupied with psychological material.

The turning from the outer world of objects to the inner world of mind at this point in the dialectic will seem forced if the true relation of these aspects of the universe is not carefully considered. It will seem like a propulsion of the argument by the eliciting of formal implications: the rationalistic assertion that the outer implies the inner, in the mere sense of complementary concepts. But it is not as a concept, set over against the principle of positive science, that the inner is now to be regarded. We have watched the reality of the human act emerge from a body of external science as its essential life, and in a similar way, inwardness, broadly interpreted, is shaped in the womb of externality. Qualities which we are accustomed uncritically to associate with an abstract inner world—variety, spontaneity, creation—are to be found everywhere, not only in the kingdom of life and of thought, but even in such an elementary fact as the contact of two bodies. The organization of matter into wholes and the capacity of free will, characteristics, as we ordinarily think, of mind exclusively, already exist in outline and dim suggestion below consciousness: for example, in the tendency of physical or vital elements to group themselves into intelligible systems or compounds, and of these compounds to develop in determinable directions. Thus science itself testifies to something at work in nature which is not mere mechanical combination and dissolution; natural processes exhibit at least an external teleology.

It is not, however, quite accurate to say that the mind as we know it evolves from cruder forms of the synthetic principle in the inanimate world. Both human intelligence and quasi-purposiveness below consciousness imply a third something which

explains them and the relation between them. The gathering together of physical elements into systems is not the result of chance, but implies an infinite puissance, and this power which directs the processes of nature also manifests itself as the deeper will of the human subject. In all cases of the active concentration of the universe at points, there is operative a dominating and shaping principle—call it law of nature—call it planning intelligence—which is a richer and deeper fact than the total assemblage of phenomena. Thus the subjective principle is not the abstract antithesis of the external phenomenon which we at first took it to be but, from one point of view, a continuation of it, and better still, a more inclusive moment of reality which explains both outer and inner worlds. It is necessary, however, to trace the structure of subjectivity as such in order to understand its place in the total meaning of life. If the description is provisional, it is nevertheless a necessary part of the dialectic.

In general, the structure of the subjective takes the form of two wedges meeting at a point. The meeting-point represents the voluntary act. There is a converging movement of reality in from the mass of unconscious and semi-conscious antecedents of the free act and an expanding and diverging movement issuing from the act and representing its necessary consequences. The supreme subjective moment is thus graphically exhibited both as effect and cause. The universe focuses itself in the initiative of man, and in return man's will unites itself with the universe again. The act comes from an infinite source and goes to an infinite future; one might almost say it is itself a moment abstracted from infinity.

At its lowest level consciousness is scarcely distinguishable from an event or a succession of events in nature. When images, appetites, and instincts first emerge in primitive life, the only obvious advance in the evolution of reality is the substitution of psychological automatism for mechanical determinism, and that seems a formal rather than a real distinction. Sensation seems to follow stimulus in much the way that reaction follows action in the physical world, without any higher control or secret spring of power entering into the sequence of events. And yet closer



examination shows that two peculiarities mark psychological life from its very beginning and differentiate it from inert matter: Every conscious process, even the simplest image or desire, is transcendent in relation to the sum of antecedent conditions, and genuinely creative in relation to what follows. The first qualification implies that every instance of subjective functioning is an instance of ontological novelty. In focusing the mass of its causes it transmutes the substances entering into its composition into an entirely new thing. Furthermore, since consciousness effects a genuine work of assimilation and transformation, all nature may be said to be thereby rendered subjective, for there can enter into mind only what is susceptible of mental digestion and incorporation. The outer influence in becoming part of the unique inward idea becomes very body of very spirit. It is a common observation that every true synthesis is more than the sum of its parts and that it is in a measure an original phenomenon; but the transcendence exemplified in the operations of the subjective act is of an exceptional and profound type. The peculiarity of the subjective synthesis is its reference—a reference which cannot be clearly explained until the conclusion of the dialectic—to an infinite puissance in the back-ground. The particular act is deputy not only of the sum of its causes, but of a dimly-divined sustaining infinite.

The second quality that distinguishes mental life from the inorganic is its inherent power to produce new life. Every idea is a creative force. And just as transmutation of the past in an act is symbolic of a universal efficacy, so the productive energy of the act is symbolic of the universal productive energy. The force of the unit of mind immediately present is a sign of a secret power which actuates and animates the whole ascending movement of the will.

By virtue, then, of these two general properties of subjective life, the progress from primitive instincts to the rational free act takes place. Images and instincts combine and form motives, and motives are true novelties. Motives in their aspect as creative forces may be called *mobilia*, for they set in train a new series of mental events. These motives or *mobilia* group them-

selves into mutually competitive systems, and the new phenomenon known as reflection springs from their multiplication and intestine warfare. The distinguishing characteristic of reflection is that it assembles the small increments of force immanent in the individual systems, and applies the product as a total force temporarily to arrest the élan of the mind. In a word, inhibition is the essential property of reflection. But though arresting in its tendency, reflection is not sterile. The function of reason which attaches to reflection ultimately awards the power distilled by the whole reflective process to one of the competing individual systems; and this decisive movement gives a positive and dynamic complexion to reflection, resolving it on its positive side into the voluntary act. In brief, reason substitutes the single agent for the many partial conditions. When reason comes to fruition in free action, the goal of the subjective movement, in so far as it was directed inward toward a focal point, is achieved.

It will be remembered that at the moment of volition the psychological movement changes its direction from inward to outward. Although every mental process looks both inward and outward, before and behind, the voluntary action is the shining example of the double reference. For a man to be free means that he is thoroughly determined in his character and habits, that the causal chain leading up to the moment of choice extends uninterruptedly into the past, and at the same time that he has set up a train of influences that will lose itself in an infinite future.

But this connection of the free act with the linear infinite—a series of events in time—is not its most important relation to infinity. In deliberate choice the human being, lighted by reason and gathered into unity, for the first time clearly senses his participation in that secret spring of power which is the sustaining infinite. For the first time the *volonté voulante* shines forth in the practice of a finite creature. But though it appears, the deeper function cannot yet assume control, but shows itself only in flashes. The finite mind cannot readily grasp the significance of the profounder will and is not easily won into union with it. The more liberty, the less license, and the more law. The fact

that the greater will which supports our being appears to us, in the first instance, as the moral law determining choice, endows it with an awful and almost forbidding presence. We feel that the human will, when it is freest and most expansive, is by the same token bound in submission to something which does not take its rise in us, but is outside and above. Therefore, in the conduct which is specifically moral, there is an acute sense of the cleft in the will, and of the effort to match the *volonté voulue* with the *volonté voulante*. Being finite, we continually seek to satisfy ourselves with the limited ends which we can easily picture forth and fully compass. At the same time, being infinite, we cannot rest content with the aspirations of our own isolated wills; and so the tension in us between the real and ideal, what we actually do and what we hope and desire to do, tears us and draws us on.

The deference of the free will to moral law marks the commencement of the expansive movement of mind and of the third stage of the phenomenology. The sentiment of obligation involves the subordination of the particular will to a universal sense of right; and so the center of authority no longer resides in the heart of the individual but in some vague depository of authority out in space. Morality and egocentricity will not live together; therefore the advent of the moral law in human life necessitates the projection of interest and will away from the subject into the object. Now the exchange of self-consciousness for trust in external guidance may at first seem to be a retrogression. Consciousness arose in vague instincts and feelings that could scarcely be distinguished from natural processes, and here we have a reappearance of irreflection, a seeming recrudescence of primitive habits. But the function which at this stage goes back into the environment is very different from the one which came out of it. An at least partially integrated spirit has supplanted a simple undifferentiated tendency. And since, however far mind progresses, it always remains a living function, it is clear that it cannot abstract itself from a soil. An exchange of substance must occur for life to maintain itself; spirit needs nature as much as nature needs spirit. The moral will,

then, may now be seen to abandon its abstract existence, pass outward, and enrich itself by mingling with the unconscious environment.

The first obstacle that the will meets when it begins to express itself as a responsible function in the world is the physical body with which it is associated. The will must become flesh, so to speak—get to itself hands and feet—before it can be efficacious. Mind must mold body into a fit instrument for its ends. The expression of a wish by physical means is so common a phenomenon and so nearly instinctive with us in maturity that we are likely to think of it as a *datum*; but in reality it is an achievement. What is the meaning of fatigue and the arduousness of labor but that the body offers resistance to the smooth outward passage of the will? When the body considered as mere brute passivity has been metamorphosed by the impact of the living will, the bodily appetites have to be dealt with. These are subordinate psycho-physical systems which are not initially in harmony with the impulses of the central will. Sometimes, indeed, it seems to take nothing more than a definite operation of the central will to set the separateness and divergence of aim of the appetites into sharp relief. Besides the treacherous and recalcitrant appetites there are the passions that erect themselves into pseudo-wills. Passions may be called pseudo-wills, because they can borrow for the time being the color of rationality; it is characteristic of them to sway the whole personality while they are functioning, just as it is characteristic of the reasonable will to organize subordinate systems into one whole. Now it might seem that the expanding movement of the subject and the dominance of the moral will would require, if in the case of the brute weight of the body only vitalization, in the case of the appetites and passions an active conquest. But the character of consciousness is action, and it would be against nature for it to destroy any evidence of action, however misdirected. What actually happens is that the will blends with its own substance all the diffuse and diverse tendencies of the body and achieves, not the triumph of a single faculty or entity over others, but a genuine enrichment of the personality. The will feeds not only on

the selected motive, but on the opposing ones which serve, so to speak, as appropriated subsistence. A kind of transsubstantiation takes place, and the law of the spirit penetrates the members. Action is thus the synergy which brings together the objective and subjective.<sup>1</sup>

The next circle through which the will passes in its outward journey is the kingdom of material objects. This is the fourth stage in the phenomenology of action. When the subjective act has diffused itself through an individual body, it seeks to prolong itself, as it were, by means of a magnified body, into the universe at large. The will aspires to mark and master all it comes in contact with as it has shaped and mastered the bodily organs and appetites. Now in a sense ordinary physical science deals with our mental representations of external objects, but the account it gives is purposely abstract; for physics and chemistry are not interested in the subjective features of outer nature, but expressly in the object minus the subjective element. It is left for our philosophical science of action to do justice to the 'characteristic physiognomy' of an act—symbol of the individuality of the subject—as it appears stamped on the visible face of things. Although this singular and concrete impression made by the human will on nature is neglected by positivism, it is in reality the most interesting and important record of the meeting of the outer and inner worlds. It is the 'signature' of mind on matter which explains such facts as the interpretation of a man's spirit from his facial expression or the embodiment of inner sentiments or intentions in a gesture.

The ability of the human will thus to express its individuality in terms of matter implies a complaisance on the part of matter; that is, the will could not reappear—different and yet the same—in the shape of houses and statues and machines, if wood and stone and steel were not already such as mind may fashion to its uses. A kinship between mind and matter is implied in their constant co-operation toward concrete ends. The recognition of this kinship calls for a revision of the description of the power of the will over matter. The will does not precisely do some-

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<sup>1</sup> *L'Action*, pp. 195, 196.

thing to matter, as if the former were all active, and the latter all passive. The will solicits or occasions a response from its environment. Any action of a comprehensive sort is more properly called coaction or collaboration. When we act, we do more than wake up sleeping potencies; for if there were not already a disposition on the part of the milieu to receive and advance human suggestions, no blare of trumpets or sound of drum could wake dead nature. It is always dangerous to use subjective terminology in describing the inorganic, but with due allowance for the distortion of metaphor, we may say that the surrounding system of things is full of dynamic aptitudes and profound spontaneities, and that when we act effectively we merely arouse to sympathetic action the subjectivity of the ambient universe. To act is then "to penetrate by tact and divination into the enclosed intimacy of other subjects and interest them in oneself"<sup>1</sup>—to assimilate outer energies to the will.

The work of art is the ultimate example of man's capacity to express his will through matter. A painting or a sonata is a purpose or idea in sensuous form; through it the immaterial functions of man become incarnate beyond the periphery of the human body, and in such wise that all may share the beauty that originated in one man's inspiration. A work of art is thus not a mere 'thing'; it is a social cement, a connecting link between mind and mind. The life, for example, of a page of Dante or of a Gothic cathedral does not cease when Dante dies or the chisels are laid down; the interpretations of thousands of people enter into and alter the very substance of the building and the page, and draw multitudes together in the experience of a common appreciation.

So far as impersonal products are concerned, the universal work of art is the terminus of the Alexandrian process of the emanations of the will. But there is a personal as well as an impersonal set of consequences of the act; and in the consideration of these we approach the fifth and last stage of the phenomenology. In so far as action is a social function, it no longer commits the subject to external signs or recalcitrant matter, nor

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 222.

even to the potentiality of action, but to substances, alive in very deed. The heart of the subject elicits a response from the counterpart of itself. The incommunicable and shadowy part of a man penetrates into and allies itself with the analogous part of other human beings, for it is the center of individuality that the social instinct seeks out.

The simplest form of social relationship in which action expresses itself is that of teacher and pupil. The process of learning is of course no mere mechanical acquisition of information; rather it is the spontaneous repetition (a paradoxical phrase required by the fact) by the disciple of the intelligent act of the master. The teacher sees his notions and attitude reappear, but in such wise that they seem new births of spirit. Since in the process of education, not only knowledge, but life and love are communicated, education shadows forth that most intimate of social relationships—romantic love.

In romantic love the subject achieves the duplication of the mysterious core of his own being which is demanded by the intensity and immensity of his desire; the two sexes join to form an exclusive universe of their own. Man cannot be sufficiently egoistic by himself, so he devises this 'egotism in pairs.' But though an individual gets all through union with another, he at the same time gives all. He gets all, because no subtlety of self-interest could yield him the consideration and tender care that the solicitude of his mate brings him in spontaneous devotion. He gives all, for the entire world is as nothing to him in comparison with the loved one; the loved one is literally his world. This combination of complete acquisition and complete renunciation is the 'miracle of love.'

But the infinite *élan* of the will cannot burn itself out in the reciprocal devotion of two. Without knowing it perhaps, each lover wills the fruit of common love more than the love itself. The child is the visible image of a double love made single; in his offspring man for the first time survives whole in a product; the child offers the possibility of the empirical fulfillment of human ambition. The individual dies, but the race continues and accomplishes what death precludes for one person in isolation.

The next larger concrete embodiment of social feeling, beyond the family, is the state. This is not a mere extension of the family, but something peculiar to itself. Nevertheless a discipline is secured within the family circle—a consideration for others and respect for the analogous claims of other family groups—which prepares the way for political unity. It is the task of history to determine what constitutes the individuality of separate states, and only a history which is intensely patriotic, penetrating to and sympathizing with the intimate sentiments of the citizenry, can understand a nation's genius. The conventional explanations of political unity, law, language, custom, boundaries, are all abstractions; the individuality of the state, like all individuality, is ineffable.

The sentiment for humanity as such, while in its turn irreducible and original, is an outgrowth of the criticism and extension of the love of country. In ancient times hostility to strangers was the necessary counterpart of love for fellow-countrymen. It is a contribution of the modern age to ethics that we now feel for man as such, whatever his race, condition, or country.

But the center of man's interest must be forced still further out if the primitive impulse of the will is to be satisfied. The Stoics were right in insisting on man's universality, that is, on his interdependence with the total system of things. Every act, despatched into the outer immensity, is a risk; for the universal milieu takes the act from human hands and operates upon it according to infinitely complex laws and forces. No shrewdness of calculation can foretell its outcome. From this appears how futile a logic of clear and distinct ideas is in dealing with the consequences and implications of the will. A science of morals is inevitably an actual experiment.

Since the calculation of utility is not even physically possible in ethics, disinterestedness is the only possible character for virtue. Acts are perforce thrown out into the world to take their chances and come back with what fruit they may. But disinterested conduct is, by a curious contradiction at the heart of the moral life, at the same time the most interested. What the



will gains in losing itself abroad is somehow its own well-being. To abandon oneself in high enterprise is identical with the subtlest self-interest. By its own power, the will can neither satisfy nor define itself; but by relinquishing its independence and yielding to the environment, its nature becomes defined and its cravings satisfied.

But the satisfaction is not attained this side of the supernatural, and the process of the will's determination is infinitely slow and difficult. There are many imperfect attempts at definition before a full realization of the ultimate character and need of the will is reached. The preceding argument has made clear that the fundamental longing of the will is never matched by any specific good, and that beyond all particular ends, the will wills itself. Something is left over after the futile drama of finite seeking and finding is done: it is the will positing and seeking itself. Metaphysics refers to this superfluity of pure will as a transcendent principle or intellectual synthesis or pure form. Metaphysics, however, is the concern of but few. The left-over of will is hypostatized by the mass of mankind, and fixed within the limits of some idol fashioned in the blind groping for adequate expression. This making a 'thing' out of an ulterior need is superstition. The ordinary man not only hypostatizes his deepest impulse, but he makes a thing that he can manage, and devises ritual and ceremonial, so that his God may be charmed and chanted into giving him the values he covets. The attempt to make a servant out of a true infinite assumes various forms, but from the very nature of the case, it can never succeed. Man is brought then face to face with a supreme option: either to choose at whatever cost a satisfaction of the will that will correspond to the nature and depth of his sincerest longing, or to toss forever among the vanities of limited satisfactions.

### CHAPTER III

## CONTINUATION OF THE SUMMARY OF THE DIALECTIC

The natural state of man is a grievous one. The whole previous course of the dialectic has demonstrated either the unhappiness or the futility of our efforts when we rest on our own strength. We cannot do what we want to do; we do what we do not want to do; and we often end by wanting to do what we originally did not want to do. Human beings who reflect deeply enough to measure the extent of their own misery, realize that this is a fair statement of their condition. Most men pursue blindly the countless trifles which gleam for a moment ahead with the false promise of satisfaction. But neither by any one of the immediate goods which men seek, nor by their sum, can the deep yearning of the human spirit be quenched.

There are certain so-called enlightened ones who are keen enough to perceive the vanity of ordinary desires, but who do not see the precise implication of their correct observation. They infer from the nothingness of particular things to the unreality of the whole. They thus make a final superstition of their own superior disillusionment. A cynical attitude is as untrue to the hidden depths of being as the more banal attitude of content with trifles. In neither case has reflection revealed what is involved in the phenomenal course of the will.

Neither the cynic nor the trifler notes that whatever else he thinks away, he cannot think away the willing act itself. Suppose the case of a man who lives a life of complete self-indulgence; he would imagine himself to be freely choosing his lot. But this would not be strictly true. Even if for the sake of argument one could suppose him to gain complete satisfaction by the unlimited gratification of his private desires, he would yet be at the bottom a slave, for he would not choose *that* he will,

however much he might choose *what* he willed. A tyranny would remain which would have to be abolished if the deepest need of the will were to be met.

If we eliminate the empirical will as a false and misleading appearance, what is left? "I will, and if nothing that I will contents me, . . . it is because I will me myself more than all that I am."<sup>1</sup> Metaphysical reflection never reaches this deeper content of the basic will, but the content is there, inevitably given in the shortcoming of the actualized will. The previous argument which has brought us by inescapable logic to the assertion of the transcendent and supernatural may be briefly summed up as follows: "It is impossible not to posit the question of human destiny, impossible to give it a negative solution, impossible to find either in oneself or others the desire of one's heart, in a word, impossible either to stop, advance or withdraw, by virtue of one's own power. There is something in my acts which I cannot understand or equal, something which keeps me from falling back into nothingness, and which is a reality only because it is nothing that I have willed hitherto. It is this never-ending conflict of what cannot be with what must be that brings us to the affirmation of the 'one thing necessary' (*l'unique nécessaire*)."<sup>2</sup>

The conclusion comes through inescapable logic indeed, and yet not a logic of the reason alone. The existence of the 'one thing necessary' is established by a vital and visible process and not by the constraining force of formal deduction. Dialectic in our philosophy of action is not dialectic in the ordinary sense, that is, the systematic analysis of concepts with the purpose of finding out what is implied in them; in this context it is the unfolding of a real content, and proof under its auspices partakes of the same concrete character. The proof is driven home by something that happens rather than by something that is inferred. Now the existence of *l'unique nécessaire*—that is, of God—is sufficiently established by observation of the career of human volition; that is the type of proof with which we are

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<sup>1</sup> *L'Action*, p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* n. 339.

here concerned. But the old rationalistic proofs of the existence of God may be reinterpreted in the light of the new conception of dialectic, and, thus revitalized, may afford corroborative evidence.

The old cosmological argument passed from the mere idea of contingency as illustrated in the natural world to the mere idea of necessary being, or God. But mere ideas in the mind cannot fructify. Instead, therefore, of operating with the abstraction of contingency, we now rest our case on the experienced and dynamic contingency of natural things which implies the support felt as present in the very center of our being.

The teleological argument undergoes a similar transformation. The evidences of design and purpose in nature do not point, for a living dialectic, to some external cause or producer, but to the perfection experienced within the soul. Every man feels within himself the functioning of an ideal, and he also is aware of the disproportion between the ideal and his own normal performance. Now the ideal and actual slide past each other within us, as the quality of our conduct varies. The point where they pass is the point of coincidence of real and ideal or the actualized "pure act of perfect thought."<sup>1</sup> This living spring of beauty and wisdom is the source of the observed harmony in the world.

The ontological argument, again, is not in its essence the drawing out of the implications of a proposition. We do not really infer the existence of God from a definition of the nature of supreme perfection, but we feel and know the presence of God. "Without dialectical complication, in the winking of an eye, for everybody at every hour, God is the immediate certitude without which there is no other—the first clearness, the language that one knows without ever having learned it."<sup>2</sup>

It is obvious that not only the proofs of the existence of God but the conception of his nature would be remodeled by the force of a living dialectic. He bears two aspects, according to the point of view from which he is observed. When we view him

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 351, 352.

through the medium of the disproportion between our actual and ideal will, he manifests himself as a standard of perfection or fixed 'nature'. He seems given and finished. But in so far as he flees ever before, no matter how swiftly we follow after, he seems dynamic and unfinished. We grasp him through an act: to think of God is always to act; and action implies movement in what is referred to in the act.<sup>1</sup>

God, thus complexly and concretely defined, is necessarily posited in consciousness. We cannot escape the thought of him, and we cannot escape the obligation to do something in reference to him. He is present to us in the shape of a practical demand, and we have either to accept or reject him; for the necessary thought of God is the culmination of a process of will, and a process of will always issues in an option. We are, then, at this point in the dialectic, face to face with an absolute dilemma: We must either ourselves be gods, without and against God (this is the rejection of God), or we must be God, by and with God (which is to accept him). We must either flower into divinities in our separate private capacities, or we must lose ourselves in *l'unique nécessaire*.

The first alternative, although it is the denial of our own most intimate desire, is the natural and common choice of man; for it is hard to acknowledge an ultimate dependence. We are ready enough to own to particular needs and limits, but we begrudge the admission that we cannot even choose whether we will or will not acknowledge our dependence. Man likes to feel that he may limit or renounce the mystery of his own nature at pleasure. But in believing this, he sophisticates himself, and fabricates a kind of 'secondary sincerity.' He is asserting the freedom of the will; but he is asserting it theoretically while denying it practically. "Not to wish all that one wishes, and to persuade oneself that one does wish all that one wishes while one doesn't wish it and knows it—this while subtle in the phraseology of reflection, is common enough in practice."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. L. Laberthonnière: "For Christian thought God is the eternal action of an eternal life." *Le Réalisme Chrétien et l'Idéalisme Grec*, Paris, P. Lethielloux, 1904, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action*, p. 361.

If a man takes the first horn of the dilemma, he erects himself into a divinity. How then does a human being make a god out of himself? He does it by depreciating the true God into a finished external existence, to be accepted or rejected at pleasure, and by then placing in God's stead, and worshipping, his own private infinity of desires. When a man makes an idol of the gratification of his personal whims, he has perhaps gained the whole world, but he has lost his own soul. In theological phraseology, he is worthy of eternal damnation. The penalty of damnation is deserved, because, in choosing the passing show of pleasure, a finite creature has presumed to murder God: that is, he has been guilty of killing divinity in so far as divinity was resident in him. This is the unpardonable sin: the rejection of the one thing necessary by the assertion of the private will. From this analysis it appears how false is the pretension that in indulging oneself, one serves one's own interests. The truth is that he who loves himself in the sense of the present context hates and damns himself. That the punishment of the selfish person should be eternal follows from the infinite implications of any act of will. We have already observed that to have willed, no matter to what end, is to have willed forever; therefore, to have chosen evil is to have brought upon oneself the infinite consequences of evil.

The only remedy for this supreme sin is the sacrificial atonement. God has to die *in propria persona* that the capital crime of man may be wiped out. No other act can be conceived which can match in magnitude the magnitude of man's wrong choice at the critical turning of the ways. The justice of man's eternal punishment is thus rationally supported and the doctrine of the atonement explained on logical grounds.

Through wilful folly, then, man damns himself. The question now arises whether, if at the moral crisis, man chooses the other alternative and loses himself in God, he thereby saves himself. The answer to this question reveals in all its sharpness the contradiction inherent in the ultimate nature of the will. All genuine activity is two-fold in constitution; it is a collaboration of the divine and human traits bound together in human per-

sonality. Now if man is to achieve his soul's salvation he must distinguish the functions of these two aspects of his nature. The finite in him must apparently do all the work, and God must receive all the credit. Man as man must assume the whole responsibility of the moral issue, he must labor for good ends as if no other being existed in the world who could help him; then, having exerted himself utterly, he must count his toil as nothing. Through all the effort God has been the source of strength. Thus, the perfection of activity for man is to feel and confess his absolute passivity in relation to God.<sup>1</sup> If this paradox seems too hard for clear apprehension, it must be remembered that the highest experiences do not yield themselves to sure logical analysis, but must be demonstrated in the organon of life. Saints and mystics witness to this mysterious duplicity of genuine piety, and their testimony confounds formal logic.

In seeking God, the practical rule is to yield oneself and the whole universe to the good. But the good must not be confused with the charming. The dialectic has demonstrated the hollowness of all partial satisfactions of the will, and to choose at this juncture the pleasantly and superficially good is to fall back on the abandoned principle of the empirical will. The natural desires have to be born again as the voice of duty in order to harmonize with the quality of the will which is now in control, and duty is famous as 'the stern daughter of the voice of God.' Natural inclinations are not evil if they are kept in their place and molded to high uses, but they must be of a character to survive in the absolute authority of the divine will if they are to prove acceptable in any profound interpretation of 'good.' The good must be chosen as at the behest of a superior will.

The chief agency in the metamorphosis of the will from man's desire to God's command is suffering. No man realizes the life

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hoernlé, *Studies in Contemporary Metaphysics*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920, p. 303. "(The student of religion) will find himself encouraged, indeed, to use his resources to the utmost—trust in God does not mean 'moral holidays'—but he will be taught also that the roots of evil lie very deep and that his strength is weakness." In this context Hoernlé cites James: "Sincerely to give up one's conceit or hope of being good in one's own right is the only door to the universe's deeper reaches."

of God within him except by the way of mortification. And this is not such an irrational requirement of the good life as it superficially seems. We have already established the truth that man must be passive in relation to God if his practical career is to win ultimate sanction. But to be passive means to yield oneself to external impression. Presumably, the deeper the impression made from without, the greater the passivity, and the more acceptable the virtue. Now the limit of pressure would be painful pressure; in other words, the infliction of suffering by God on man would be God's most gracious act toward his human creatures. 'Whom the Lord loveth'—the conclusion is familiar. There is deep meaning in the mystical exclamation: 'Amiable and dear pain! Those who feel it would not exchange it for all the sweetness of the world;'<sup>1</sup> for devout souls who thus spontaneously cry out have penetrated to the inner significance of suffering. They welcome it to their spirits as a fertilizing process, and because of their attitude, perfectly adapted to the character of what seems at first forbidding, they experience an entirely novel type of happiness.

Through suffering, the transcendent will of God is revealed to man, and the supernatural comes alive in the natural. Now the supernatural, taken abstractly, has always been a stumbling-block to reason. And yet the analysis of its function through the medium of the dialectic shows that, though paradoxical like all profound realities, it is at least half reasonable in constitution. It is necessarily posited by the reason, because it solves the inevitable problem of human destiny and satisfies the primitive *élan* of the will. If the supernatural is viewed, not abstractly, but in conjunction with the natural, as the outgrowth and necessary complement of the universal human process of the yearning for satisfaction, it is no longer an offense to the understanding. The real offense would be for man's ineradicable need to meet with nothing correspondent to it. The extra-human must supplement the human, or nothing—not even the slightest concrete fact in the world—is transparent to reason. Nev-

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 382.



ertheless, reason itself demands that the supernatural should, in part, remain beyond reason. The transcendent will must remain mysterious and ineffable in order to be itself, however much, by implication and expression, it shines through the visible and finite. If it loses for man's mind its mysterious character, he denies its transcendent origin. Thus, in his perversity, he makes opposite demands of the supernatural: it must be accessible to the human spirit and must appear in concrete signs and tokens—otherwise it is unmeaning to him and he cannot deal with it either to accept or reject it—and, in the second place, it must remain inaccessible—otherwise there would be no sense in calling it *super-natural*. The complete fulfilment of desire must arrive on the shores of time as a free act of grace, as the gift of God, undeserved of man. Not only must God confer the gift, but he must furnish the very impulse toward the acceptance of his own gift, if the idiosyncrasy of the supernatural is to be preserved in its integrity. In no way can the infinite be a finite achievement.

The intellect can never reconcile these contrary demands to which it itself gives sanction. Only by real experiment will a man come to know what is demanded by the sincere logic of his will. The problem that can never be solved if left on the intellectual plane can, once more in the dialectic, be solved by the mediating force and transforming power of action. Without losing any of its supernatural quality, revealed truth penetrates to the understanding by way of action, for action is the one fitting receptacle of a gift of grace.

Another way of saying that the logic of the yearning will needs action for its ultimate satisfaction is to say that the intent and faith of sincere religion require the forms of religion for their living commentary and final elucidation. The letter of religion—ritual, deeds of piety and charity, acceptance of authoritative dogma—is the necessary counterpart of the spirit of religion. There is no true faith without works, and no works, of saving virtue, except through faith. And just as the idea which is the intellectual content of faith must come from a non-empirical source, so the actions which are the verification and life of

faith must spring from the supernatural. A man must be forced to do what he does not wholly understand the rationality of, and would not be capable of willing to do if he were merely an isolated finite creature. Thus the specific action which is religious practice must manifest itself to a human being as prescribed action. But the prescribed action of religion is obedience to the authority and implications of dogma. Therefore, if the will is to fulfill its destiny, it must be assimilated to transcendent reality through dogma. The sacraments, rites, beliefs, and formal observances enjoined by dogma become the vital food of rational faith; they are the letter and body of religion, without which religion is hollow. But in saying that the material observances and formal assent prescribed by the letter of religious law are necessary aspects of the life of religion, one does not imply that they are merely or baldly material. It is through the body that the miracle of generation takes place, and so it is through the body of holy communion that the birth of God in us takes place. In this sense, the body is more spiritual than the spirit; for the God that comes in to dwell in the heart through the efficacy of the sacrament is more inward to us than ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

In so far as the dialectic is a succession of particular positions, it ends in the present moment of the abnegation of the human will in favor of the divine. The conclusion of the argument in the sense of an unfolding of the implications of voluntary action is, then, the eternal religious paradox of the dying to live—the dying to oneself that one may live in God; or rather that God, as he is in and for himself, may live in us. Our true desire is to deny our own wishes and to substitute God's will for our own. But though this be the termination of the progress of the will, thought itself must press on; for the question is inevitable: By what right is this net-work of relations which we have called the dialectic of action interpreted as objectively real? However logical the steps may be as the mind moves on from condition to condition, there would seem to be no guarantee in such a system

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<sup>1</sup> "God is more internal to us than ourselves," a saying of Ravaisson, quoted by Parodi, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

of implications of its ontological validity. How is the idea of the objective existence of the expansion of the will ratified?

The reason that the dialectic of action cannot be supposed to hang phantom-like in air, without subsistence or extra-logical authority, is that the will appears to us not merely as the subjective function of free choice, but as a 'nature'. This 'nature of things' is the aspect of tyranny in the concrete whole of will. *That* we must will and know is not posterior to our separate acts of will, but anterior. *That* the will follows a certain law is not, once more, for us to choose, but eternal verity. And once again, *that* every man must face, by the force of the dialectic, a supreme option, where he shall either choose or reject the 'one thing necessary', is not a moral or intellectual obligation merely, but law of nature.

Since the nature of reality is independent of human operations, it is only the extent of being which man can affect. At that parting of the ways in human destiny where a man accepts or refuses the action of the infinite in him, he has it in his power<sup>\*</sup> to influence the quantity, as distinguished from the character, of reality in the world. If our private will prevents us from coming to fruition in our true will, we exclude reality from ourselves. The universal order is only actual in our knowledge and practice to the extent that we freely adhere to the necessity imposed upon us transcendently and externally. And the method of affirmation for finite beings is always the way of sacrifice. We have to give up the universe in order to win God, and welcome pain and hardship and death; for these naturally abhorred experiences are, when rightly viewed, the action of God in us. In a word, "sacrifice is the solution of the metaphysical problem by the experimental method."<sup>1</sup>

The appearance of an exclusive choice, at the moment when man is faced with the necessity of gaining God or losing him—affirming reality or denying it—is illusory. Superficially, either alternative would seem to mean both a gain and a loss; if a man gains God, he loses the world; if he loses the world, he gains

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, n. 442.

God. But this is to speak in terms of the uninspired natural intelligence, and to reckon gain and loss on the level of the scientific understanding. If a man chooses his own pleasure, he loses God, indeed, but does not gain the world; for the essence of the world inheres in God's existence; and, on the other hand, if he chooses God, his gain is double and infinite: he gains not only God, but the whole created system of things which is implied in God.

The supremacy of the rôle of action in the dialectic, and both its specific and general functions, are at last revealed. Its provisional importance was shown at every step in the dialectic, for objects and attitudes on all levels of reality remained static and external to each other until action wrought the miracle of their fusion and interpenetration. But the all-embracing and ultimate function of action comes to light clearly only at the conclusion of the argument. It is not enough that objects or sets of objects or abstracted points of view should be seen together in unity. Something must account for the integrity of the realm of nature and knowledge, regarded as a systematic whole. It is action, in its aspect of continuous process, which creates, within the whole, intelligible distinction—the truth of being which we usually call the law of contradiction; and it is action, in the aspect of profound and immanent source of reality, that weaves the distinguished elements into a harmonious pattern and shows their oneness. This organizing power of action is one of its universal properties; the other is its ability to make alive the entire system, when the system is concentrated and brought to test at a single point in the universe—in the individual human soul. Action makes hypothetical reality categorical. The creative energy of the *volonté voulante* converts the existence of the infinite, which in the abstract empirical consciousness is an existence *appetitu* and *intellectu*, into an existence *re*. Viewed in this general aspect, the mediating function of action is no longer the binding power of a single consciousness or of a faculty of consciousness; it is no longer the *nisus* of the will, in time, to match its own ideal; it is the eternal life of the Divine Mediator.

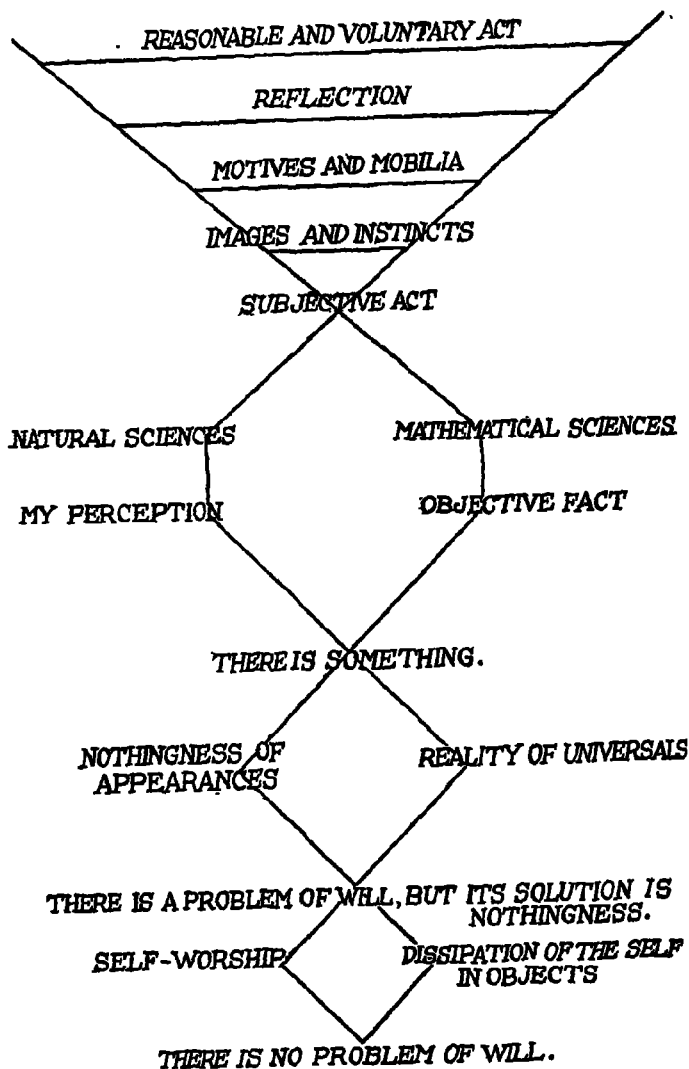


FIGURE I

This diagram illustrates the process of the dialectic in *L'Action*, pp. 1-144, Summary, pp. 15-25.

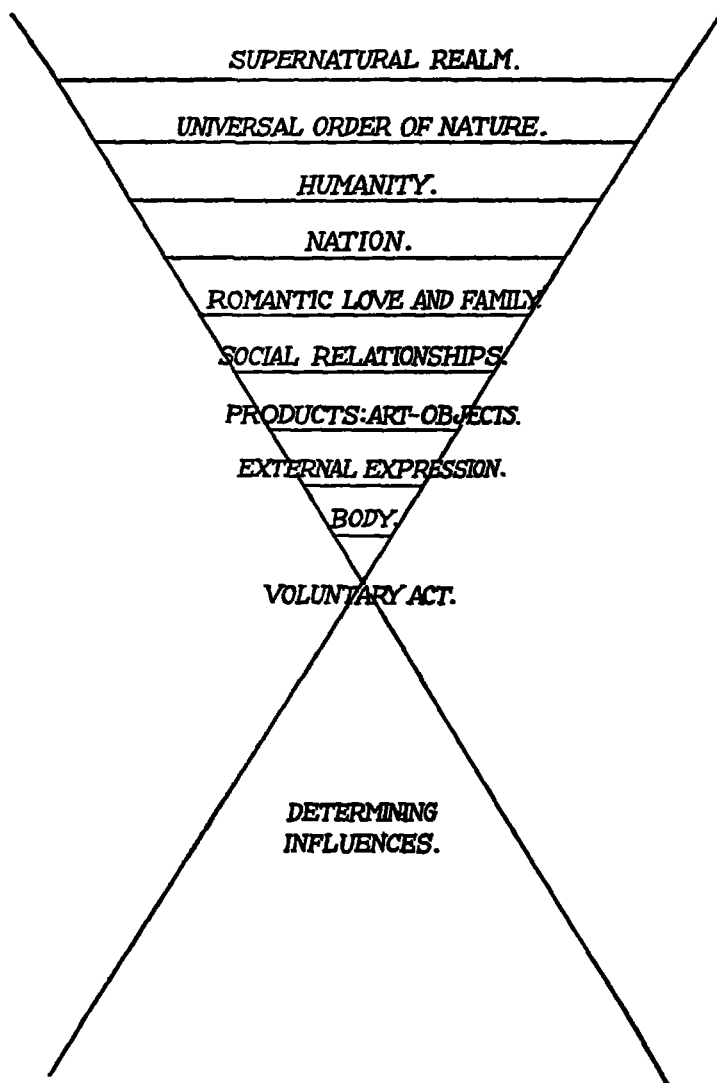


FIGURE II

This diagram illustrates the movements anterior and posterior to the voluntary act, *L'Action*, 144-323, Summary, pp. 25-32.

'the return to nature' in metaphysical speculation. It signalizes the vital thrill that accompanies a fresh contact with reality. There is to be life, concreteness, human interest, in what he puts forth. His predecessors in reflection have often given only a piece of themselves—some one inadequate faculty of their beings—to the work of interpretation, and the result has been barren abstraction. Blondel means to function as a whole, and to bring forth a rich and full body of wisdom which shall not slight any aspect of man or nature. The word 'action' in our writer's usage expresses, at its minimum, the general qualities of vitality, integrity, and warm motion.

Writing as he did at a time when positivism and natural science dominated thought in large measure, it was natural that Blondel, following absolutely in spirit his master, M. Ollé-Laprune, should feel the necessity of emphasizing the dynamic and organic aspects of concrete thinking. And his assertion that ardor and spontaneity are appropriate to philosophy is not mere assertion; the accent and style of Blondel's writing attest the earnestness and intimacy of the intellectual effort. But, after thus much has been freely admitted, it must be said that the comparison he draws between the vividness and originality of his own (together with his master's) achievement and the previous history of speculation shows a lack of that very inwardness of appreciation which he so strongly advocates. The famous definition of Novalis: "*Philosophiren ist dephlegmatisiren, vivificiren*", applies on the whole to the spirit of philosophy from the beginning, and the tendency to think of the philosophical description as a mirror held up to reality from without or as a projected calculation of future events has been exceptional rather than typical. But Blondel will not admit the vital character of the typical philosophical endeavor: "Plato said that 'philosophy culminates in Ideas'; and almost everyone after him, in his different way, has speculated as if speculation were an end-in-itself. Even when the conclusions were practical prescriptions, they were mere theories of practice, ideas about action, and not action effectually fitted into the organon of truth."<sup>1</sup> He makes a

<sup>1</sup> *Ollé-Laprune*, p. 80, note.

similar stricture on the substance of German post-Kantian Idealism: "(It) substitutes on the whole the notional for the real and defies the anthropomorphic conditions of our discursive thought, so that in the end the pure and infinite spirit is no more than an hypostatized abstraction."<sup>1</sup> Of Descartes, he says that he was trying to wrest reality out of a dream, and of Kant that he conjured up some sort of a Categorical Imperative out of some sort of night.<sup>2</sup> In view of the truth that all of these philosophers were, as they supposed, and at least with partial success, assimilating their thought to life, one wonders at first whether an unsympathetic attitude may not hinder Blondel's penetrative imagination from carrying him on into a true understanding of the ultimate relations of things.

'Action' as descriptive of Blondel's philosophy means, then, in the first place, a spirit of vitality and of opposition to 'ideology.' But action is more than the animating spirit of the work; it is also the content. Our thinker's critique of life and science of practice is about action as well as active; and the dynamic is not only the manner of a successful account of reality, but the principle of reality itself.

Action as the chief category of Blondel's intellectual construction is a principle of union between two kinds of will. Aristotle, he says, thought of action as the passage of potentiality to actuality, but he himself would prefer to define it as the synthesis and progress of two concurrent potentialities.<sup>3</sup> The theory of the two wills—their interrelationships, functions, and destinies—is the theme of the whole view we have under consideration; it determines the course of the dialectic.

There is, in the first place, the will that everybody knows,—the general function which manifests itself in particular desires. Descriptive psychology, economics, sociology, empirical ethics, all give an account of it, but the accounts of positive science are a mere extension without change of principle of one of the most

<sup>1</sup> *Process*, p. 304. note.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Action*, p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 216. The definitions in the text add further details, but enough is given here for the immediate purposes of the discussion.



familiar types of experience. An end is conceived—the satisfaction of an appetite or the possession of an object—and the image of the end to be achieved sets in train the dynamic process that operates toward the indulgence of the appetite or the attainment of the object. One wish is no sooner gratified than another is stimulated; and from one point of view human life may be regarded as an indefinitely prolonged and complicated series of desires.

This is the will of science and sense-experience. But, while actual, it seems upon examination not to contain all its reality within itself. Something seems to be implied by the fragmentary feeling of each separate will-cycle—of the particular elements of the infinite succession of desire and gratification. While each particular want may be supplied in turn, the ultimate measure of the need is not filled up, and there is never any true integrity of satisfaction. The soul “wooded and tempted is ten thousand ways” by the various attractions that the world offers:

“With these sometimes she doth her Time beguile,  
These do by fits her Fantasie possess;  
But she distastes them all within a while,  
And in the sweetest finds a Tediuousness.”

What then, it is necessary to ask, is indicated by the left-over of desire, and the under-satisfactoriness of satisfaction? What seems to be suggested is either that the empirical will itself is a thicker and deeper entity than we superficially suppose, or else that there is another will underlying and including the first; and that thus the ultimate *plan* of the spirit is directed, not toward the concrete things that shape themselves on our picturing imagination day after day, but toward a reality matching itself in magnitude.

Now the series of events which constitutes the activity of the superficial will is not of uniform magnitude. The older and wiser a man becomes, the more comprehensive his wishes even in the sensory realm. The impulse and enjoyment that center

around a beautiful picture are more enduring and more complexly organized—in a word, contain more essence—than the appetite for and pleasure in a bowl of broth.

Family life is more productive of vital satisfaction than a toy is. The implied understructure of will shows through more clearly, the more expansive, self-conscious, and critical the manifest will becomes. Even in the acts of a man who lives a life of pleasure, if his pleasure be of a high-minded sort, there is more substance present than he is conscious of. He is more moved by respect for law and for distinguished character than he supposes; he misses more than half the truth when he interprets his respect for law as the instinct for pleasure. Not only is there more intrinsic being in the function of will in its higher stages of development, but there is a greater inclusion of objective matter. When mature reflection animates will the external universe is drawn into the work of the will with more frequency and sureness. Thus the way to and the nature of the non-sensuous will is marked out already in the sensuous.

There is, then, in the second place, the profound will which very few people clearly understand. This is the "*voluntas ut natura*" of ancient and medieval tradition, intellectual appetite, '*volonté voulante*', the fundamental inclination which necessarily determined the aspiration, restless yearning, and thrust of the human spirit toward its supreme goal. It is that congenital movement of the *volonté voulante* which reflection and the *volonté voulue* differentiate into movements toward the partial and successive ends which present themselves to us as the means or occasions of accomplishing our destiny. Our destiny has no meaning except the ultimate equation of these two initial and final wills."<sup>1</sup> With the two wills defined, we begin to grasp the meaning of action for Blondel; for action is just this instrument of our destiny which spreads itself out in time as the process of the equation of the wills. Action, we may now say, is the con-

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<sup>1</sup> Note by Blondel in the *Vocabulaire Philosophique*, Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie, XXII, 2, pp. 82,83.

stantly increasing influence of the vital will of the universe upon the individual will of man, until the two wills join in a concrete intuition of God, 'the one thing necessary.'

That the essential religious experience is the consummation of action is not surprising to those who have given themselves to life, and have followed the dynamic argument whithersoever it would lead. The miracle of conversion from a life for self to a realization of divinity is only forbiddingly mysterious to those who have refused to recognize the laws of their own empirical nature, who have refused, that is, to live sincerely. What religion at its best offers is identical with what man genuinely wills, when the implications of his will are exhaustively developed.

In spite of Blondel's patient effort to elicit the reality of the supernatural from propositions generally admitted, and to assert the transcendence of divine action as a necessary moment in a consistent dialectic, the mere terms 'supernatural' and 'transcendent' excite alarm in the contemporary critical philosopher. The 'scientific' thinker is likely at once to repudiate the conception of a *volonté voulante* because, as an intimate, secret, and infinite aspiration and a dark and unplumbed spring of power, it breaks through the limits of the natural world from the realm of the supernatural. What is not experience, our critic would say, is not in any intelligible sense real. And he would be likely to dispose of Blondel's whole critique of life as an example of special pleading for the doctrines of the church, and not a speculative inquiry or an illustration of scientific procedure.

Whether Blondel's theory of the will is legitimate 'science' or not is finally a question of his exact meaning. At least, a condemnation of his doctrine ought not to rest on merely technical or verbal grounds. It is true that we are intellectually reared at present to react at once hostilely to the notions of the transcendent and supernatural, and we cannot, without retrogression, relinquish that important body of philosophical criticism which now shows itself in us as a hostile instinct. In so far as writers wish to impose on us conceptions out of relation with the established body of knowledge, intuitions and inspirations which

cannot be interpreted in the light of normal functions, we are justified in declaring their philosophical irrelevance. But if the critic means something narrower than this, if he tends to identify valid knowledge with what is or has been directly sensed, he is not then entitled to agreement. The implications and assumptions involved in what is directly perceived are continuous with experience, and form as secure a footing for the sure march of reason as any we are acquainted with.

Now I take it that Blondel, while explicitly describing the culmination of action and the nature of the profound will as transcendent, means always to show them as inescapable implications of the seen and heard. If, he seems to say, you give me any foot-hold at all, if you give me a tree on a hill or a passing thought in the mind, you give me all. You give me this apparently but not ultimately mysterious *élan* of the divine in the universe and in us. If any critic reply that he for his part does not feel compelled to move from the immediately experienced to these distant and shadowy realms of the *volonté voulante* and the *unique nécessaire*, the answer to him would be: If you are not compelled in your private concatenations of judgments to derive the conclusions that others derive, nothing is to be done about it. But you cannot fix the limits—you who know so little about reality that you cannot predict the events of tomorrow—of what others may find bound up in their interpretations of the world. We find even such a good empiricist as William James saying: "The logical understanding, working in abstraction from . . . specifically religious experiences, will always omit something, and fail to reach completely adequate conclusions."<sup>1</sup>

Blondel's intention, I believe, is to remain throughout a thorough empiricist. When he asserts the existence of God, reshaping in the living dialectic the old rationalistic arguments, he does it, he affirms, by virtue of vital feelings and observed phenomena. The heart witnesses to God in that first language that it speaks without instruction; the whole realm of nature, existing and functioning as our senses attest, can only be what we

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<sup>1</sup> *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 306, quoted by Hoernlé, *Studies in Contemporary Metaphysics*, p. 298.

acknowledge it to be, if God also exists and functions. The dialectic focuses its total force at the point where the reality of God is to be logically established, and inclines reason by virtue of its total evidence toward assent. Our philosopher expressly repudiates such abstract notions as that of an '*arrière-fond*', or a thing-in-itself in the Kantian sense. Experience is all I need, he seems to say, but it would not be fair to contract experience before giving it to me. The truth, however, that he is entitled to his deeper realities, if he finds them in any way bound up with what we feel and know and do, does not carry with it the assertion that he actually exhibits the connection in convincing ways. Although the speculative sin of using the words 'supernatural' and 'transcendent' is but venial, reason demands that the reference of the terms be demonstrable and not fanciful.

The case for the scientific and empirical validity of Blondel's treatment of the 'profound will' and the fruition of action is strengthened by the trend of his criticism of other philosophies of will. For example, he finds that Schopenhauer's conception of the will-to-live as unreasonable is based on a superficial reading of the longings of the human heart. If Schopenhauer's perception of fact is keener than the ordinary perceptions of men, in that he replaces a superficial optimism by an insistence on the manifold miseries of existence, his observation is nevertheless not sufficiently thorough-going. The pessimist's assertion that the fascination of a fragile voluptuousness veils from view the realities of pain and death often connected with sexual indulgence is true; the romantic impulse is a more tragic fact than most men realize. On the other hand, a still more careful analysis of the impulse connected with the procreation of children reveals a deep-lying harmony between the will for the continuation of the species and the desire of the individual, even though the fulfillment of the desire brings suffering. Schopenhauer misses in his account of experience the fundamental human wish to make ideals concrete in the child. A man's sex-impulse is not merely a fleeting selfish passion fraught with infinite painful consequences; in its more profound aspect it is a man's wish to produce another man better than himself. So while the fact of

family life and the impulses connected with it illustrate with startling vividness 'dissolving human frailty'—for the more births the more pain, and the more deaths—they emphasize still more the indissoluble unity of man, for through the generations the hope of perfection may come nearer realization than in the span of a single life. The desire for children is not finally evidence of our defeat, but rather of progress on the road of our spiritual destiny.<sup>1</sup>

Plain facts then would appear to support Blondel in his divergence from Schopenhauer. The Frenchman would appear to have rendered the data of experience more successfully. He claims superiority for his theory of the moral will over Kant's on the same ground. Kant's interpretation of the sanctions of the moral life and the meaning of duty—his *Critique of Practical Reason*—is transcendent in the bad sense; it is misty and formal. It "conjures up some sort of a Categorical Imperative out of some sort of a night." The Kantian transfer of the roots of moral endeavor from phenomenal to noumenal soil is its philosophical damnation. For, says Blondel, "neither the form nor the matter of moral obligation is the expression of an Imperative that has no roots in real life, of a mysterious and arbitrary command. Duty is not a datum nor an order that imposes itself blindly on consciousness." Morality has its empirical as well as its rational sanctions; it is heteronomous as well as autonomous. The law of duty is indeed absolute at the instant of its promulgation, but it is at the same time relative, in that it is the provisional resumé of the history of the person acting. What Kant asserts of its complete authoritativeness is true, but he errs in denying its connection with the groping and experiment of our instinctive life. A true science of practice presents duty as the law of the will's progressive enrichment and the concrete pattern of its hierarchy of functions, moral right being thus always relative to the stage the will has reached in following out the implications of its nature.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action*, pp. 259, 260.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

But practical morality is not for Blondel simply a law of progress or even the goal of the natural order. The volitions of the ethical life are ultimately viewed as so much creative energy. The facts of nature figure in ethics first as the theatre of the will, then as its content, but finally as the body which it spins out of itself. "Voluntary action thus absorbs everything else in order to fashion organs for itself and to create out of nature a universe."<sup>1</sup>

In his criticism of Kant, Blondel seems hardly to do justice to the concrete intention of that philosopher. If the *Critique of Practical Reason* could be adequately summed up in the formula 'duty for duty's sake' and if, on the other hand, Blondel had held consistently to his definition of morality as the realizing form of the natural world, it would undoubtedly be true that the contemporary had kept the closer of the two to the matter of experience. But when Blondel passes from the description of the deeper will as immanent in nature in the capacity of guiding principle to the description of it as an original creative force, he falls into language that is suggestive of Kant in Kant's most formal aspects. "Those ideas," he says, "which disengage themselves from scientific or practical experience... express the element in voluntary action which does not come from nature—what the will still wills after it has absorbed all nature. They express the aspiration for existence of the as yet non-existent which must exist if the imperious demands of sincerity are to be satisfied. We consider at this point the incorporation in voluntary action of that ideal order which is the transcendent end of the natural order."<sup>2</sup> The will then which is product of nature is at the same time issue of super-nature; moral obligation exhibits a measure of independence; and the heterogeneity of the will in its higher reaches over against natural phenomena is as positive a fact as their interdependence. Will as supernatural is the will willing itself—a conception which is, it would seem, quite as formal as Kant's of the rational will deriving the maxim of its law from itself alone.

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

The truth of the matter seems to be, as his criticism of other practical philosophies would indicate, that Blondel wavers between a concrete and abstract interpretation of action. His intention is always to be concrete: to exhibit action as the living whole of which we perceive only fragments in ordinary experience, and the profound will as the essential aspect of action. The elucidation of the meaning of action, he says in the introduction, must be made the center of philosophy, because action is already the center of life.<sup>1</sup> In a sense, action is the whole of man; in another sense, it is the whole of God; but in the deepest sense of all, it is the synthesis of man and God.<sup>2</sup> Again he says: "Practice . . . is the very substance of the knowable world and the realizing truth of the universal order. It is in it that sensible data, in spite of their inconsistency; scientific symbolism, in spite of its incoherence; the dynamism of the subjective life, in spite of the instability which constantly disturbs its equilibrium; organic and social phenomena, in spite of the determinism which never constitutes a synthesis except to make it an element in an ulterior synthesis; in short, it is in action that all the forms of science and life find their common reason for being. Being never subsists in the abstract idea of action."<sup>3</sup>

"Being never subsists in the abstract idea of action". If this be true, then real action ought never to be represented by action in the superficial sense of indeterminate force. Action as true synthetic principle cannot be even provisionally shadowed forth by action which is defined by exclusion of reason. Allowing for the distortion of preliminary views, we may expect to find action appearing early in the dialectic as an embryonic power of organization. But a function which is in character and essence universal ought at no point to manifest itself as in character and essence abstract. It is because Blondel sometimes slips back into the representation of the center of life and substance of

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 385.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 478.



reality as mere formless power that his intention to imply an underlying reality which is individual and concrete is not always fulfilled in practice.

We have been saying that if action is to issue triumphantly at last as an 'identity in difference', it cannot start by showing itself as the logical contradictory of what it is later to assimilate and organize. Yet Blondel persistently represents his dynamic power as breaking through the crust of an absolutely heterogeneous matter, or as drawing together by a miraculous energy two utterly inert bodies. He seems almost to create a bad intellectual situation in order to make the all-conquering virtue and power of action shine forth more clearly. Nothing can happen or give promise of happening until this *deus ex machina* leaps from below or from the rear and operates the miracle of motion. If, for example, as Blondel elaborately explains, the mathematical sciences deal with pure homogeneity and the natural with pure heterogeneity, obviously nothing but a miracle will get them together. But the question is whether the application of mathematics to a concrete subject-matter is a mechanical compound of three totally disparate elements: the artificial system of symbols which we call mathematics, the original synthesis of matter in nature which is the phenomenon to be mathematically interpreted, and the human act which joins the other two. Is it true, as Blondel insists, that mathematical science has nothing to do with reality at all until the human subject by free act of grace confers relevance to reality upon it? For him, an artifice and decree is always needed for the passage from quality to measure or from measure to quality.

Similarly the whole body of positive science is set over against action in order to accentuate the prerogative reality of the dynamic. Blondel allows that some of the facts dealt with by science are individual, but he seems not to allow for any but mechanical modes of connection between facts in science. He seems to neglect the truth that teleological categories are as native to that realm of knowledge as the abstract laws of mathematics. But in the philosophy under consideration '*scire* (in scientific fashion) *est mensurare*.' The ambition of science as a

whole is to make nature a realized calculation. When the ultimate achievement of science regarded in its own nature is depicted as an external arranging of distinct elements, it is clear that the presence of ends and movements in nature has to be accounted for by an absolute importation. We are therefore prepared to be told that in science there is a transcendent and strange element which shows that science must be left behind (*dépassée*)—a secret borrowing and necessary mediation,<sup>1</sup> and that the profound operation by which action places an X in the original intestinal organization of things is veiled from analysis and observation.<sup>2</sup>

It is true that Blondel, inspired by his better vision of what action is, tries to mediate the false alternative he has established between the external world of phenomena, which is the material of science, and the secret, unique, mysterious potency which he invokes to introduce life and motion into it. His doctrine of all action as 'coaction' or collaboration between man and the world immediately supervenes upon the statement of the absolute opposition between man and nature. Reshaping his earlier absolute distinction, he now says that man cannot bend nature to his uses or add the organic to the inorganic if nature does not already possess some aptitude for human purposes, some potentiality of reason and motion. Superficially this seems to be Blondel's recognition of the fact that nothing can be brought into relation with anything else in the universe if there is not an initial subsistent harmony—unity inherent in the world's variety. At first one thinks that he is refuting his own earlier abstractness by insisting on the community of nature in the parts of a reality which he has violently ruptured. But although Blondel does in intention and dim perception recognize the indispensability of inwardness of connection between the *differentia* of a genuine universal, he cannot altogether free himself from "that tendency to take the relative as absolute which, more or less everywhere, leads us astray in speculation as in life, and on every hand lures us into imprisonment within some false alter-

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

native."<sup>1</sup> His phrases about the sleeping energies of outer objects, the dormant potencies of stones, the subjective and active nature of brute elements, the ambient dynamism in the universe, the embryo intention implied by the resistance of matter, are designed to suggest the immanence of teleological principles in the apparently mechanical universe. But the context of these phrases betrays his ineradicable disposition to make of action one particular among others, and not only a particular, but one that is mysterious and supernatural. Having said that in operating on matter, mind actually does nothing more than wake from sleep a dormant energy, he thus continues: "The pretensions of magic or occultism are not therefore altogether absurd; there is a natural incantation which, however inefficacious under normal conditions, may become the principle of marvelous or even miraculous operations."<sup>2</sup> He then proceeds to liken the action of man on matter to the phenomena of hypnotism, and thus to resolve away this too, too solid earth into perpetual interflowings of impalpable influences. If Blondel had had firmly in hand the concreteness of all nature—human and inorganic—and had clearly grasped the necessary implications of the principle of individuality, he would not have needed to resort to the occult to explain the normal and natural fact of the resistance of matter.

The treatment of action as blind force appears on a grand scale as the dialectic nears its conclusion, when the moments of being drawn together by the 'artifice and decree' of action are magnificent faces of the universe. What is it, Blondel asks—surprisingly enough—at the end of the dialectic, that confers objective validity upon the systematic process of the will's evolution? The reader has taken the 'living dialectic' in good faith; he has understood it to be no rationalistic analysis of concepts, but life and being spread out for inspection. He has supposed that nothing could make any more real this progressive triumph of the *volonté voulante*. And yet he is suddenly assured at the climax of the argument that unless a fiat of the human—or

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<sup>1</sup> F. H. Bradley, *The Principles of Logic*, 2nd ed., Vol. II, p. 713.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 220.

rather the divine-human—will intervenes, the whole dialectic lapses into nothingness. By the pure act of a creative word the two separated termini of being are brought together; action is a divine mediator who makes the entire nature of things regarded as a series of means or conceptual truths come alive in the volition of man. There is no ontological significance in the logic of action until it has been gathered up in a free act of will and affirmed. By the crucial act of self-mortification, at the moment of supreme option, man makes being being. Now while, as we shall later see, there is spiritual meaning and true intent in this presentation of the supreme rôle of action, reason resents the treatment of the religious life as if it were a single momentous act which breathes the breath of life into an impotent shell of reality.

We have discovered thus far three conceptions of action in Blondel's philosophy: action as vital spirit in philosophy; action as synthetic principle of reality; action as unmotivated and shapeless force. *Since action in this last sense is indeterminate*, nothing can restrain it from appearing in a variety of forms, all equally unintelligible and non-empirical. It is a secret aspiration and mysterious primitive *élan*, and as such is linearly infinite. It is a flash of life, a click or fillip which actuates choice, a special intermediary which joins the disparate; and appearing thus, it is a spurt of energy. Blondel intends these phases of action as purely provisional manifestations; and yet he so introduces them that they appear inevitable at a particular stage, and as genuinely true even if not the whole truth. He effects their plausibility by exaggerating the opposite quality from that which he is about to assign to action in the immediate setting. Thus if science is interpreted as unnaturally mechanical, the application of science has to be interpreted as unnaturally dynamic. If the subjective function of volition is interpreted as unnaturally enclosed within the periphery of the single mind, the outward expression of volition has to be explained by some unnatural potency which makes a leap and spring from the dark. It is by this device of contrast that Blondel throughout gives an

intense dramatic quality of motion to his main synthesizing function. But unfortunately he gives it not only vividness, but irremediable abstractness as well.

When action, for example, appears as the will willing itself—the last straining of the vital impulse toward complete satisfaction—he is forced into a curiously formal and abstract mode of description by the deliberate depreciation of normal human happiness. It is a plain falsification of the facts of life to picture ordinary existence as nothing else than the prophet's scroll, full of "lamentations and mourning and woe". We receive from the world a tremendous impression of evil; there is no question of that. We also receive an overwhelming impression of good; that again is unquestionable. It is a sheer begging of the question to paint the world all black at the outset in order to make a striking background for a flash of energy. But Blondel's procedure is to make very sharp and complete the sense of our failure as mere creatures of sense, and then to splice to this empirical failure a remainder or extra of longing which he calls the will as it is in itself, or the will willing itself. The bare identity of a will willing itself is just as false and just as true as the intellectual situation that produces it—the will utterly unmatched by satisfaction.

Blondel's justification for his less adequate treatment of action, as we have been at some pains to say, is his intention always to transcend it by a view more in harmony with experience and logically more concrete. But at the very terminus of his argument something of the contradiction remains. The act, beyond which there is no other to elucidate further the meaning of action, is the divine work of grace in the human heart. And because this act is to the very finish in part supernatural, even though necessitated by the logic of human nature, it is in that part and in so far mysterious. It must remain unintelligible because it must remain an operation by God's favor, and not an achievement by man's power. Man even wills that it should remain beyond his will and beyond his intelligence because only so can its transcendence remain unimpaired. Here then is transcendence which does not resolve away into immanence.

God's infinite act is individual not in the sense of organic to all the acts of experience, but individual in the sense of ineffable. It contains an inexpugnable element of the enigmatical. In so far as this character of action persists in the final statement, the secrecy and irrationality of the will's expressions from the beginning of the argument are a true sign of what is to be unfolded in it. *In this sense*, then, as index of the supernatural quality of God who is pure act, Blondel wishes action on all levels to hint at an unfathomable content. He believes this attribute to be consistent with perfect concreteness. But at last a choice would seem to be forced. What is concrete yields to intelligence; and what is intelligible cannot be in any part, through principle, unintelligible.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NOTIONAL AND THE REAL INTELLIGENCE

Blondel's theory of the intellect is the complement and counterpart of his theory of action. As action appears in his system now as formless *élan* or empty push, and now as the total unity of spirit, human and divine, so thought appears now as the analytic understanding or rigid skeleton, and now as the living presence of the Universal plan in the finite intelligence. When Blondel makes an abstraction of the dynamic, he by that very act makes an abstraction of thought; for the elements that he provisionally or inadvertently excludes from action in his less adequate interpretation of that function are the elements without which the intellectual function cannot be conceived. What he cuts off is not the whole of the process of the intelligence, but the necessary frame of its being. When he splits reality, making half of it pure motion, he has already determined what the other half must be: it must be static ideation. When, on the other hand, he chooses to qualify the substance of reality as action, indicating by that term its principal apprehensible character, he has in so doing assimilated thought to action, and made it impossible, in that part of his description, to place them over against each other. In so far as action is a concrete universal, a synthetic principle, it receives its shape from an intellectual function which is also somehow coextensive with reality.

One may read far in *L'Action* without guessing that Blondel has, reserved in the deeper reaches of his speculation, any concept of a vital intelligence. With his strong love for clean contrast, he repeatedly and persistently identifies thought with the artificial constructs of rationalism and the unreal patterns of formal logic. Thought proceeds, we are given to understand, by the mechanical method of inclusion and exclusion, and can never conciliate contraries; life must supervene upon thought to bring opposites together. "Nothing is more dangerous (in moral questions) than logical deductions, clear and distinct ideas, over-sim-

plification. Man's vital beliefs are the result of continued gropings, innumerable experiments, and, so to speak, a gradual settling-down in one's spiritual life. These processes contain more wisdom and insight than the system of a brilliant genius or the profound thought of a whole academy."<sup>1</sup> "The apparent straitness of practice is enormously more ample than all the pretended largeness of speculation."<sup>2</sup> In his analytic mood, Blondel is unable to assert the primacy of action without denying the reality and validity of reason. 'In actu perfectio', but in reflection an irremediable insufficiency. The depreciation of reason shows itself as a definite logical habit in the piecing out of intellect by action at the turning-points in the dialectic. Thought cannot, for Blondel, make ends meet or turn dialectical corners. Action is needed to make the decisive movement in joining the natural and mathematical sciences, subject and object, finite and infinite. Even when he admits a certain validity in the conclusions of speculation, he is likely to be impatient with the slow and winding character of its procedure, which he contrasts with the swift sureness of will. "If", he says in referring to Kant, "the Critical Philosophy destroyed the objective validity of time and space, long, long ago the moral sense . . . achieved its Transcendental Aesthetic. The upright conscience learns in a single flash what rational analysis attains laboriously enough."<sup>3</sup>

In passages such as we have cited, Blondel makes clear his opinion of the narrowness and impotence of the notional intelligence. One is led to investigate the exact nature of his theory of this species of intelligence in order to ascertain what attributes of mind lie for him at the root of abstract rationalism. What explains the ineffectiveness of reason?

In the first place, then, thought copies reality; it does not penetrate or possess it; the relation of the two to each other is adequately represented by the radical heterogeneity of the portrait and the original. Correspond point for point as the idea may to the thing which it symbolizes, the externality of the re-

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 283.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 422.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366.



lation is an irremediable defect. The outer fact pertains to the inner fact only by convention, as there is no essential community between what represents and what is represented. Even if, moved by an impulse to enter into and possess true being, the rational faculty responds in so far as it can, it has no resource except to multiply 'notes and notations'; and a mere multiplication of external symbols, however much it refines the reference, can never make the notion internal to the thing. Positivism, rationalism, and speculative idealism are all alike held off from the reality they intend, by this fundamental logical weakness of externality. They are essentially philosophies of mimicry.

In the second place, the analytic understanding falls short because it never gets beyond a thing's relations to deal with substance. This is another form in which its general externality shows itself. For any given thing divides into two parts: a heart of ineffable individuality—*res ipsissima*—and an outer rind of relations; and the ultimate truth of a thing is never understood until its individuality is grasped. An object is not constituted by its relations; it is constituted by itself. Now the ideas which stand always outside of reality and copy it achieve their end by an indefinitely extended and refined elaboration of relationships. The laws of development and of spatial and temporal determination are worked out in the hope of getting closer to the matter itself. Scientists would have us believe that reality is known fully when its genesis and behavior are reduced to precise mathematical formulae. "But the pretension of making the principal object of intelligence and the intelligible nature of knowledge consist in relations implies this double idea: That reality is formed of isolable elements and that it is possible to represent it or reconstitute it by means of these ingredients as if with atoms."<sup>1</sup> But an atomistic logic is obviously unsuited to spiritual truth; for spiritual truth is a living function and assimilates the thing it knows.

The third inadequacy of the notional intelligence is its instrumental character. "However ornamented by the title of objec-

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<sup>1</sup> *Le Procès de L'Intelligence*, p. 234.

tive, it is never more than an *aide-memoire*, a tool for disentangling, and a series of hypotheses and prospectuses to verify and complete."<sup>1</sup> It is a means of analyzing and distinguishing the elements in a situation and thus is perhaps a necessary preparation for the activity of a synthetic principle. But it is never completely efficacious; it never arrives. It serves the interests of life in its own way and in its peculiar place; but the way and place are secondary and derived. In practice confusion often results because analysis, which is always a means and therefore partial, is treated as if it were the type of all knowledge and sufficient for the facts.

Blondel's 'real intelligence' may almost be defined by the removal of all the strictures placed on dissecting and isolating notionalism. Instead of remaining external to the object, real intelligence is the living presence of reality in the thought of reality and the assimilation of being to the description of being. It dispenses with images and gets truth and substance; it cannot be represented by the analogy of a portrait or of physical atoms, for it involves higher categories than they imply. It is life, not matter; and growth, not mechanism. The unsatisfactoriness of relational knowledge is replaced by the satisfactoriness of the possession of the center of individuality. It is both the origin and the fulfillment of that intermediate stage of understanding which we call scientific analysis: the origin because the freshness of the first impression sets in motion the desire to analyze; fulfillment, because the plenitude of real knowledge brings into concrete existence all that is enfolded within partial views.

The real intelligence is vital and concrete, but it does not possess the warm and living qualities of human experience at the expense of power of analysis. It is not—at least in theory—what the scientific understanding is not, without also being what the scientific understanding is. When Blondel clearly contemplates the consequences of the repudiation of formal analysis as typical of intelligence, he realizes at the same time that there is an opposite reef to be avoided. There are those, he says, who in

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

their zeal for the freshness and richness of intimate experience shun definite contours and clear views, and who know no way to preserve the flavor of life except to embody it in subjective and arbitrary illuminations and sudden bounds. They repudiate a false intellectualism only to plunge blindly into an equally false mysticism. Cannot one possess and see at the same time, he inquires; if knowledge becomes real, does it cease to be knowledge? A satisfactory philosophy of spirit will show the two attributes—clear form and living substance—in indissoluble union. "Knowledge 'through action and energy' is not in conflict with thought but the normal way of its development and perfection."<sup>1</sup>

To prove that intelligence of this vital sort is thoroughly articulate, Blondel uses for his purposes and incorporates into his argument St. Thomas's account of the perfecting of the mind. By this methodological device he intends to secure favorable evidence from a supposedly hostile witness, for who more intellectual among the revered of religious philosophers than St. Thomas, and has not the spirit of St. Thomas been taken as the sufficient refutation of a 'philosophy of action'? If, then, it can be shown that the Angelic Doctor's theory of the intellectual function is closely in harmony with the one here presented, it would hardly seem that Blondel could be called an irrational dynamist.

St. Thomas conceived of the mind in its simplest form as a congenital affinity with nature. Through this relationship animal sensibility is penetrated from the outset with the principle of reason. In its lowest stage the intellect is capacity rather than actuality, but the capacity possesses an implicit scheme—the tendency to become a universe; so that when set in motion it is able to become one with the nature of things. From being a mere resonance, the mind develops into a positive inclination. The beginning of mind sets a task—it shows itself as a force to be controlled and educated; and the further development of the mind is the determination of the original potency. In its second stage, then, mind as natural affinity is replaced by mind which

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

'glides towards its other.' It is now more elaborated and orientated than as the primitive sympathy; its tendencies are more specific and deliberate. At this second level the words of St. Augustine begin to apply: "Anima est plus ubi amat quam ubi animat." The third stage of intellection is marked by the emergence of compassion and kindness. These supposed emotions have essential elements of intelligence in them, for a man cannot understand who is not passive in relation to other people, and who does not charitably receive the impress of their action upon him. The more unselfish one is, other things being equal, the more penetration he has, and the more deeply is he versed in the science of human nature. Through suffering with other people and entering into their experiences, and even by suffering at their hands, one attains plasticity of mind, and becomes in a very accurate sense of the word, more intelligent. But the social functioning of intelligence, implying still as it does distinction between the ego and the alter, is not the terminus of the intellectual development. The end must be more universal and impersonal: ultimately intelligence is action. But action is not here intended in the sense of an isolated subjective initiative; it is intended in the sense of "a total and effectual concurrence of power."<sup>1</sup> It is the coöperation of not only the various individual powers of men, but of God and man. It is the "illuminating source of a universal synthesis." Passion is a part of this active knowing, because knowing at this level cannot be defined by the exclusion of any essential quality of man's functioning. There is no distinction between action in the most comprehensive sense of the word and intelligence in the fullest interpretation.

The Thomistic view of the evolution of true knowing as here given is so like Blondel's own theory that they may be taken as different forms of an identical conception. But this is after all an indirect proof of the validity of Blondel's philosophy—an argument by appeal to authority. It is necessary to return to

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*

Blondel and inquire more in detail into the method of operation of our philosopher's concrete intelligence to see if it stands logical examination in its own peculiar constitution.

Perhaps the clearest statement of the meaning of 'living dialectic' or 'humanistic experiment'—terms which Blondel employs to suggest the distinctive quality of his own conception of the intellectual method—is to be found in his description of the procedure of his master which is the model of his own. "It was M. Ollé-Laprune's fundamental originality," he says, "never to be content with an idea, whatever the idea might be, without seeking its commentary, sanction, and proof in the laboratory of life, without confronting it with practical exigencies, without measuring it by his total manhood."<sup>1</sup> His method, he goes on to say, was infinitely complex. He passed judgment on any idea put before his mind by a large and firm *appreciation d'ensemble* that embraced his reactions as philosopher, artist, scholar, and believer. This complex judgment appeared superficially as an unreflective impression, but as a matter of fact, it was founded on the common culture of his will and understanding, on all the art of his life and personality. Blondel quotes a saying of Ollé-Laprune's—that "one must live and live normally, before one can philosophize normally about life, and before one can legitimately live by his philosophy."<sup>2</sup> This seems to mean that what thought achieves must be judged by other functions than thought, as well as by specifically intellectual standards. Is an idea which is logically consistent also dynamic, fruitful, beautiful? A notion satisfies the laws of identity and non-contradiction—that is, it meets the requirements of the intellect; it also gives a measure of quietus to a felt yearning—that is, it meets the requirements of will; it also harmonizes with the most generous and sincere sentiments—that is, it nourishes the emotional strain in human nature. These distinct characters of mind melt together and form a single power of appreciation, and it is the unitary power which makes judgments. Ultimately the faculty with

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<sup>1</sup> Ollé-Laprune, pp. 57, 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

which one thinks is not distinguished from any part or aspect of one's nature except in the way of greater inclusiveness. All the functions rise and act together in the deed of knowledge.

Now, as theory, this synthetic view of the intelligence is a continuation not only of the Thomistic tradition, but of the finest and most profound tradition in the history of philosophy. Bosanquet refers to the view we have given as that of the greatest thinkers: "It is true, of course, that in everyday moods what we call knowledge may fall apart from what we call practice. You may think of a thing without doing it, and you may do it without thinking about it. To think about paying your debts is not the same thing as to pay them. But all this becomes comparatively unimportant when you touch the higher grades of knowledge, when deeper experience has enlarged the self, with amplified intellectual vision as an element in the result. And it is an experience of this kind, however feebly I may succeed in expressing it, which one must bring with him if he is to understand Spinoza's third genus of cognition, or Plato's knowledge of the good, or Hegel's notion of philosophy as religion in a higher form."<sup>1</sup>

And yet, in spite of the strong concrete intent in Blondel's treatment of the intelligence, his own practice does not always bear out his intent. And even in the theoretical statement one sometimes feels the mind as a compound rather than as a life. At any rate, in his own thinking and constructing, he sometimes uses methods that properly pertain only to a rationalistic type of philosophy. The notionalism which he so clearly places, in an abstract theory of knowledge, he cannot altogether avoid when he is arranging his own body of ideas.

One definite evidence of rationalism in Blondel's philosophy is the concern he shares with Descartes to establish an incontrovertible basis for the structure of knowledge. Like Descartes he would question everything, until some proposition presents itself to his mind which cannot be questioned. He makes his scepticism so thorough-going that he questions even whether there is a

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<sup>1</sup> *The Value and Destiny of the Individual*, p. 21.

question in the philosophical sense. It is obvious that, having created a situation of universal doubt, he will require an apodictic certainty to overcome it. Like Descartes, again, he elicits his first fixed truth out of the total negation of knowledge: out of the destructive method of dilettantism a constructive impulse is extracted, just as out of Cartesian doubt, the reality of the doubter was drawn as a primary truth. The very simplest form assumed by positive truth for Blondel is the 'there is nothing' of pessimism; but this judgment is quickly resolved by him into the proposition 'there is something', and it is the affirmation rather than the negation which he regards as the initial verity of the dialectic.

There is a sense doubtless in which knowledge does begin with the assertion 'there is something.' In the phrase of technical logic, this assertion of the objectivity of our experience is the fundamental postulate of knowledge. We have to start by trusting the deliverances of consciousness; and consciousness reads off the world in confidence of its actual existence. There is a world there—or what is there? But this formulation of the beginning of knowledge is, upon the view of any empirical logic, a highly sophisticated and abstract statement of the shape taken by a whole—the totality of our most universal function.<sup>1</sup> It is meaningless apart from the concrete world which it summarizes for the special purposes of our peculiarly intellectual interests.

The judgment 'there is something' is, then, a postulate pointed out in a formal inquiry into the constitution of knowledge rather than a self-sufficient first truth. In the actual as distinguished from the formal processes of thought, the beginning may be any idea or hypothesis. Blondel's logical error is in at least partially failing to perceive that the beginning of an argument in a living dialectic—the only kind in which he admits interest—is always an abstraction from the argument as a whole, and by no means an independent entity. The exact locus or shape of the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bosanquet, *Logic*, 2nd ed., Vol. II, p. 209. "Experience may be said to begin with the certainty that 'there is somewhat'; and the postulates of knowledge do but express in abstract form the progressive definition of this 'somewhat'."

first particular proposition is a relatively slight question for the understanding of the validity of a concrete contention; the matter of interest is how the beginning—be it what it may—resolves itself into its own deeper definition and determination. Concrete thinking may attach itself, roughly with equal promise of fruitfulness, to any empirical presentation or vital hypothesis—the state of the body, a case in court, a theory of the motion of the heavenly bodies—and a true dialectic will display itself, if the limited content taken as the problem is led by analysis into a restatement of the starting-point in fuller and more illuminating terms. It is a radical misunderstanding of the nature of thought to attribute a prerogative importance to the first idea enunciated in the development of a science or to establish any 'first' of a series in an intellectual process. Concrete thinking arises anywhere, and moves in indefinitely devious fashions; it cannot be cribbed or confined to one pattern or type, nor rested on any single truth.

The supposition that Blondel is rationalistic in his treatment of the starting-point of the dialectic is confirmed by a consideration of his ideal of proof. In a truly empirical theory of knowledge there is no measurement of proof by any conceived absolute standard any more than there is a demand for a fixed first principle. Proof is not either perfect or worthless; it is as convincing as the reality taken up into it is substantial and systematic. Certainty is a function of depth and orderliness of content, not of demonstration of a bare identity. But for Blondel a statement is either proved or not proved; everything that is not established beyond a peradventure or a doubt is floating in a limbo of uncertainty. He never suggests that inference is systematic, and that the degree of certainty depends upon the inclusiveness of the context referred to in the explicit judgments of the proof. He neglects the 'intension' of terms. A conclusion is established for him by that quasi-formal superimposition of quanta upon each other which is the characteristic method of formal logic. The meaning of a word in an argument is treated as static and given, not as dynamic and relative; he isolates the elements of



propositions from their natural setting in the mind that employs them, and treats them as if they were somehow standardized for purposes of negotiation.

If the beginning of the dialectic is, for Blondel, a fixed certainty, its validity is presumably established in this formal fashion. And this is actually the case. From the judgment *Nolo velle*, which sums up for our author the elusiveness and scepticism of the dilettante, he conceives that the mind is forced to pass by incontrovertible logic to the judgment *Volo nolle*. Let us see how he effects this transition. The term *nolo*, Blondel says, is a complex made up of a negation and a reference to a will-attitude. But the reference to a will-attitude implies the existence of a will-attitude. If this logical manipulation be translated into terms of formal logic, we have: 'My will (is not) to will' (an E proposition) is equivalent by obversion to the A proposition: 'My will (is) not-to-will.' One is thus committed by a sort of mouse-trap proof to a positive attitude toward experience, and the dialectic of the Critique of Practice is set upon an irrefutable basis.

But this immediate inference, while formally valid, is not really convincing, for the term 'will' which represents the main conception in the argument is not, like  $x$  or  $y$  in an algebraic equation, a mere counter or symbol, but is weighted down with meaning. Its meaning, and consequently the way in which it may be legitimately handled for purposes of proof, varies according to the mental setting from which it has been for the moment withdrawn. If 'My will is not to will' implies a self-conscious, reflective, collected refusal to be forced into any volitional posture, then obviously there is already a contradiction in the heart of the assertion, and the person making the assertion is doing what he affirms he will not do: he is in a positive sense, willing. But (which may be equally assumed) if he means by 'My will is not to will,' I am not a person of will-attitudes at all—there is no use in arguing with me because I do not feel or do in any consistent way—I float merely—or better still—I seem at this moment to be a floater; then how can there be drawn from this absence of logic a logical assertion?

The establishment of a starting-point for the dialectic is not the only instance of formal proof in Blondel. For example, he undertakes to prove that action is an inescapable necessity, because the effort to escape it through suicide is in itself an act.<sup>1</sup> But almost anything may be proved, if, as in this case, the chief term of the inference be used without reference to the intended meaning in the person's mind. As a matter of fact, action to end action actually does end *further* action. Again, he would prove that 'nothing' cannot be thought, because to assert nothing is at the same instant to assert an "eternal presence" in the mind: therefore positive being is universally anterior to absence of being.<sup>2</sup> Again, the obvious reply is: In some sense, 'nothing' can be conceived; otherwise an argument relating to it could not be carried on. In other words, a formal affirmation of 'nothing' is as defensible as a formal denial, because both are practically meaningless. Not only this argument, but any argument, lacks real force unless the orientation of the terms is ascertained before the terms of the proof are manipulated, and before the validity of the proof is pronounced upon.

The deductions just referred to are mere details in the general argument of Blondel's dialectic. The weakness of his mode of proof appears more glaringly in those parts where vast regions of alleged reality are being considered. What, for example, is to be said of the supernatural world? Blondel believes in it, and he wishes to demonstrate its necessary connection with admitted fact. He proceeds with his demonstration by exhibiting the supernatural as the necessary complement of a need universally experienced; so much of the proof articulates with human experience, and may be claimed as 'real' or 'concrete'. But he also tries to put his point beyond dispute by such formal arguments as these: The supernatural world is possible because it is impossible to prove that it is impossible;<sup>3</sup> no science can ever show that a miracle is impossible;<sup>4</sup> we cannot take it

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<sup>1</sup> *L'Action*, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 396.

upon us to say that the supernatural is impossible because—far from being competent in complicated speculations of this sort—we cannot thoroughly understand the least detail of the least ordinary fact.<sup>1</sup>

'What is not impossible, is possible.' This is the substance of Blondel's intellectual argument for transcendent reality. But how idle, not to say mischievous, argument of this sort is, appears when the possible consequences of its general application are drawn out. 'What is not impossible'—nobody can perhaps say that a Lilliput is not somewhere existent on the face of the earth, or that the souls of the departed do not foregather on the planet Mars, or that one language will not be spoken by all the inhabitants of the earth within a generation. None of the creations of little or big children is perhaps 'impossible' in a very empty sense of the word. But that is not the meaning we attach to the idea of possibility in serious discourse. When we say that a thing is not impossible, we assert a general compatibility of the suggested fact or truth with the known constitution of reality as a whole or in some aspect. In other words, we are making a positive, though very general affirmation. We mean that, though the immediate conditions which would ground the proposed result are not at hand, the general conditions of its existence are supplied in, let us say, the normal behavior of matter, as described by natural science, or the normal behavior of persons as history presents it to us. We might say perhaps that, in view of the observable trend of human opinion and the greater refinement of moral character, the abolishment of war is not impossible. In such an assertion we commit ourselves to no prophecy about matter of fact, but we do make a positive assertion about the general nature of things. Anything that is to happen must, so far as we can see, fall within that observed or implied system.

There is no value, then, in Blondel's rational argument for the supernatural, unless it can be linked with some indication of a positive trend in reality. It is true that he tries to make this

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

connection. He says that the supernatural is the necessary complement of our ineradicable desire, which is never satisfied by the natural. But he is here using 'will' in that unfortunately abstract sense of *élan*. And no ground continuous with experience can be brought forward why a yearning of a mysterious force in human nature should find its quietus. Experience furnishes examples both of the satisfaction and of the non-satisfaction of will. Virtually, this again is an argument which derives its plausibility from a dialectic of bare concepts. An experience of need is an experience of fragmentariness. A fragment is inconceivable without the whole from which it is torn. Therefore, the need is only adequately understood when set in conjunction with the perfection which ends the need, and makes the experience integral. But we feel cheated when we are confronted by arguments of this sort. We demand matter of fact to fill out the bare form of the syllogism before we yield it assent.

And matter of fact—great or small—is always for Blondel beyond the reach of intellection. Not only is the supernatural a realm of the miraculous, but every particular happening is, in a sense, a miracle. It is idle to look for the trend of reality in science or history or philosophy, because none of these theoretical disciplines ever penetrates to the individuality of an event. They furnish merely a system of relations and have nothing to do with the heart of things. The thing itself is always incommunicable and singular; every distinct synthesis of reality is absolutely novel and original. The thought of man plays around the outside, so to speak, of the intimate locked dwelling of profound actuality. So the contention made by the ordinary logician that possibility and impossibility are functions of probability as determined by the total body of science does not hold for Blondel. The finite intelligence is utterly impotent even to give hints in ultimate contexts.

The externality of science for Blondel, including physical, mathematical, and his own practical science, has already been expounded at some length in connection with the discussion of his abstract view of action.<sup>1</sup> The denial of objectivity to that

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 58 f.

species of knowledge is extended to apply to history. With the rise of the modern school of Biblical criticism, the claim of history to pronounce upon the factuality of alleged events in the Bible was asserted by scholars both inside and outside the church. Blondel admitted the claim only in the end virtually to withdraw his admission. History can, with its tools, only report, he said, what seemed to the contemporaries of the characters of the Bible to happen. But what really happens is only revealed to the fullest insight and the most comprehensive action. Since the time of the occurrences related in the Bible, fuller grace has come to men's vision, and with this growth in knowledge and power a correspondingly greater competence to pronounce on actual events of history. Quality of spirit is a securer basis for inference than analysis of documentary evidence. Therefore what saints and mystics have read into the Bible is doubtless nearer the truth and more to be trusted than what scientific historians give out as fact.<sup>1</sup>

What has become, in all this development of Blondel's practical dependence on the notional intelligence, of his insistence on that more vital type of intelligence called 'real', which embodied both internal articulateness and dynamic efficacy, and which fell together with action in any ultimate definition? Although Blondel is never weary of proclaiming the solidarity equally with the heterogeneity of the active real intelligence and the notional intelligence, he does not, I think, exhibit the solidarity in convincing ways. It is of little avail to show that all knowing involves an affective tone and a conative element, to say that love and charity are organs of knowledge, to talk of the generosity and sincerity of will required by the philosophical adventure; or further, to maintain verbally the organic or individual character of the intellectual function, if the achievements of the intellect as we know them are made utterly abstract. Blondel's theory of the heterogeneity of the functions is intelligibly put; his theory

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<sup>1</sup> I have not been able to secure Blondel's own statements on this point. I have depended for my information on the chapter in *Modernism*, by A. L. Lilley, entitled "The 'Lettres Romaines', and Baron von Hügel's 'Du Christ Éternel'."

of their interpenetration is either general or mystical. The full intelligence is to the rational as eternity is to time, he says.<sup>1</sup> Or again, we are aided in understanding the indispensable rôle which the notional intelligence carries over into the real by contemplating the dogma of the resurrection of the body,<sup>2</sup> or by considering that a ladder attached to a boat is ultimately supported by the water underneath the boat.<sup>3</sup> Figures like these, while useful as hints, have to be filled out by a consistent logical theory in order to be genuinely illuminating. Blondel seems to admit the ultimate mystery for man of the 'real intelligence' by two clear statements—one in *L'Action* and one in *Le Procès de l'Intelligence*. "In man," he says, "the conception and the possession of real truth, although identical in a sense, remain distinct and, in fact, separable."<sup>4</sup> The other statement is: "The perfect life of Intelligence can finally only be gift, grace, revelation of a mystery naturally inaccessible."<sup>5</sup> Even to the end, he would mingle his assertions of the immanence of reality in thought with his assertions of its transcendence. But the emphasis is clearly on the transcendence.

Although this split in the human mind seems to me radically to impair the force of Blondel's construction, a 'real intelligence' is for him operative, I believe, and a measure of substantial truth presented, in his interpretation of the experiences of religion. Physical science he relegates to the mechanical categories; mathematical science never by its own virtue touches reality; the reports of history are invalidated by the imperfect mentality of the observers of the course of events; the science of practice is a series of formal propositions until the free adhesion of a subject gives it body; and even the most speculative philosophy tends to hypostatize abstractions. But religious experience is internal to reality. It tells us what is without reservation or qualification. Blondel's faith in its objectivity fits him in so far to render it accurately.

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<sup>1</sup> *Procès*, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 285-7.

<sup>4</sup> P. 429, note.

<sup>5</sup> *Procès*, pp. 272-3.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION

Both in his theory of action and in his theory of intelligence Blondel's aim—more or less achieved—is to represent the human spirit as a concrete totality. His emphasis is plain even if his success is only partial. It must be admitted that he too often lets a significant function be represented by too slight an aspect of its own nature and that the articulation of the functions, in his hands, sometimes appears mechanical. These inadequacies in his treatment are a loss in his philosophy and 'science of action'; but a defective logic is one thing and a defective vision may be another. Blondel seems to have less natural kinship with the exact thinkers than with the speculative mystics—using mystic in the best sense of the word and not as synonymous with an idle dreamer. His peculiar genius is religious. The truths of religious experience he expresses with a delicacy and persuasiveness that apparently grow out of a precise acquaintance with and an inwardness of appreciation of its distinctive content. For the religious life has a feeling of its own. Both religion and philosophy are embodiments of the total spirit: as Plato says, "the synoptical man, the man who has a conspectus of knowledge, is a philosopher; and the man who is not synoptical, who cannot see two subjects in their relation, is no philosopher"; and similarly, the man who either is a whole or joins a whole is the religious man. But though integrity is the essence of both characters, the integrity of the philosopher is more contemplative and theoretical, and the integrity of the mystic more active and imaginative. The philosopher never unites with reality in the sense that the religious genius does. He stands always and inevitably a little apart, tracing the large outlines of universal forms with sympathy indeed, but also with a little abstraction. He places the parts of the world in a schema, and he is as conscious of the connections and divisions of his subject as he is of their life within a single whole. But the man of religion feels his

universality and eternity, and loses some sense of pattern in his more vivid sense of the richness and warmth of the ultimate being. When the prophet reports his total vision, his account is likely to be a picture or a symbol and has an immediate practical import; the philosopher's tale is a logical sequence and is disinterested.

There is much both of the philosopher and the mystic in Blondel, but it is as a mystic that his work is more constructive and valuable. The large intent of the dogmas of the church he makes live again for a generation that had thought them dead, and some of the 'hard sayings' of the Scriptures he makes supple by the fire of his imagination. Perhaps the price of a measure of logical inconsequence is not too much to pay for this gain.

If a man is essentially religious, his aim is mainly practical; and this is true of Blondel. He assigns as the purpose of his elaborate philosophical construction "to make men do what they will to do."<sup>1</sup> The foremost concern of religion is to point out to men 'how they may be saved', or the 'way to blessedness', or how to discover and attain "continuous, supreme, and unending happiness."<sup>2</sup> The definition of human destiny is the center around which religious reflection turns. The saint like the common man is bent upon the satisfaction of his will; the difference is that the saint will stop with no ordinary satisfaction, but is engaged in a pursuit which is exhaustive and integral.

The instrument which is fitted to bring men to their reward, according to Blondel, is 'the generous and sincere will.' The relation of this will to the other kinds of will of which he speaks is not at first obvious. Being a practical faculty submitted to a practical end, even though that end is intended as all-inclusive, it is often described in the characteristic manner of our author as opposed to thought. Be 'loyal to the generosity of the enterprise and prefer the good life to the pride of thought,'<sup>3</sup> he enjoins. Or he explains that the generosity of the élan of the will issues in an heroic act which yields for man what all the labo-

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action*, p. xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Spinoza, *On the Improvement of the Understanding*. ¶ 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. xiv.



rious processes of philosophy will never yield. Or again he says that man verifies the supernatural by the real experiment (an act quite independent of reason) demanded by the generous and sincere will.<sup>1</sup> Assertions like these indicate roughly the place of the religious function in Blondel's system. This will is not, as might seem, quite coincident with the *volonté voulante*, because the latter is, as finally revealed, the grace and power of God, while the will under consideration is a human faculty. One might say that it is the profound will in so far as man lays hold of it in his struggle to transcend the empirical will. It is the profound will still felt as obligation and not yet sensed as victory.

Although the religious function is a practical faculty, it is also mystical; it includes what faith, love, and intuition involve in the rhapsodic literature of devotion. And it is also critical, for it effects the reconstitution of the empirical will of the natural man. In view of its great complexity, it is not surprising that it involves a fundamental paradox: the paradox of the innate gift and the acquired virtue. It must be a universal possession; the *sine qua non* of religious experience is inevitably that. It is "the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." No man is so poor or dull that he does not have in the center of his being this unique prerequisite of the best life. It is an axiom of the whole Modernist movement in religion, the movement of which Blondel was a main and original inspiration, that the means of salvation is the immediate possession of everyone's conscience, not vested in authority or laid away in a finished and dead scholasticism. As Scotus long ago preached, coming in his time to the same Modernist doctrine, the Christian God is reached not by the abstract logic of a rationalist but by the emotional appreciation of the simple-minded.<sup>2</sup>

The paradox appears when, together with this insistence on the utter simplicity and immediacy of revelation, is asserted the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 402.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bosanquet in *What Religion Is*: "'As a little child'...; that has been the motto, as of the saints, so of the wisest among mankind.... We know the type of man who on the whole gets nearest to truth. It is not the cleverest. It is, I think, the sincerest." p. viii.

supreme difficulty of the same mode of activity. The hardest thing in the world is to be simple and sincere: here we have, in fact, the needle's-eye test and the alleged proportion of failures. If every man is born with the potentiality of divinity and the revelation of the only indispensable truth, yet the process of getting at the divinity and the truth is the hardest obligation that is laid on humanity. The way to blessedness is not to be described as a mere easy look within or a facile assent to what is written on the heart, but as a journey, a fight, a strait gate or thorny path, something severe and exacting. Through such metaphors the religious imagination suggests the same truth that the philosopher Socrates embodied in the less colorful saying that the criticized life is the only life worth living. In developing the aspect of arduousness in the religious life, Blondel occupies himself with a minute discussion of how the will passes by an elaborate process of self-criticism and self-purification to the moment when it can read off its own pure significance. We have already discussed this dialectic of the will in the chapter on the meaning of action. But the dialectic acquires a somewhat specific meaning in the context of the interpretation of religion. A man's first look within reveals an empirical will directed toward a variety of particular ends; for religion these ends are not only fragmentary, they are selfish. The first look yields itself to the criticism of the religious instinct, which is not only integrating in its mode of operation like the purely speculative impulse, but 'generous and sincere'. A moral character is attributed to the larger synthesis and the science of practice is from one point of view a description of the career of a religious ascetic. But the expansion of the part into the whole takes the same form whether it be the severe practice of the ascetic, deepening the meaning of satisfaction, or the drawing out of the implications of a concept. The will is impelled to mount by its own native force toward wholeness, toward the unification of its array of disorderly impulses. But however deep the criticism of partial unsatisfactoriness goes, and however much unity is won for the world of desires, a discrepancy remains between what is willed and what is won. We want to be fully what we aspire to be, but

it is always impossible. "We want to be sufficient for ourselves, but we cannot be. . . . There are always invincible obstacles and terrible sufferings."<sup>1</sup>

Nothing partial satisfies. And yet the fact of failure is not a dead or bare fact. There is an atmosphere of mystery and inconclusiveness in the abortion of man's selfish strivings. The absolute bankruptcy of human pretensions is a fact only in so far as it implies a fact superior to itself. This superior fact which is the climax of the sincere will's career is paradoxical like the career itself. The will finally realizes itself in the denial of itself as such—that is, as isolated existence. The goal of religious endeavor is that single complex experience where utter abnegation and utter satisfaction meet. This is the fact of sacrifice, positively treated. In so interpreting it, Blondel again follows the great tradition both in philosophy and religion.

Allowance must be made, I think, for a certain dramatic exaggeration in the description by practical philosophers and pietists of the supreme act of united sacrifice and attainment. It is so difficult to realize that the act which is most painful and arduous is, when better understood, most sweet and rewarding that the wonder is small if 'experts' in the spiritual life seem to speak foolishness concerning it. Mystics are conscious, as the ordinary man is not, of that other and joyous face of sacrifice, and of how good comes out of seeming evil. They may speak then of "amiable and dear pain", as Blondel does, and be expressing profound truth. They can blacken the face of nature and expatiate on the futility of human affairs and not be mere misanthropes. All things are relative; and when the soul is dazzled by the full light of complete satisfaction, the ordinary pleasures of life do precisely appear as filth and dross in comparison with that divine content of mind which is the seldom-attained height of human ambition. The happiness is so great that the sacrifice of the whole world immediately appears slight; indeed, the very aspect of sacrifice disappears, and what is given up seems, in the context, unlovely and burdensome. The gentle Lamb's genial confession, "I am in love with this green earth", is

<sup>1</sup> *L'Action*, pp. 325, 326.

so far removed from the religious temper which says: 'Having seen God, I hate the world', that its degree of truth seems to the mystic utter falsehood.

When, therefore, Blondel expresses the supreme moment of the religious life as a sharp alternative: "Shall one seek being in nothing, scorning all the objects of sense and science, or choose the nothingness of existence, scorning the invisible and supernatural?"<sup>1</sup> the imagination of the reader ought to supply the context. For the moment the emotional intensity and dramatic temper of the religious enthusiast has been victorious over his sanity of view. The catholic appreciation of Spinoza, in his remark that "it is the part of a wise man to refresh and recreate himself with moderate and pleasant food and drink, and also with perfumes, with the soft beauty of growing plants, with dress, with music, with many sports, with theatres, and the like",<sup>2</sup> comes nearer the truth. Yet, although there is a residue of regret that devout souls slip in their high moments from full concreteness of outlook, there is a spiritual truth in their exaggerations which more rational minds neglect. The core of truth in Blondel's interpretation of the meaning of sacrifice is, then, that a soul's salvation depends on the utter giving up of whatever conflicts in its experience with recognized good, however charming or plausible the hampering allurements may be. This does not imply that what is to be given up is the sum of sense-experiences and scientific knowledge. It is quite possible in any individual case that the conflicting element may be excess of supposed religious zeal; and in that case occupation with sensible details—the ordering of a house or respect for the physical body—or greater confidence in scientific conclusions may be precisely the 'being' which ought to be embraced. But *in this sense*, that *something must be sacrificed that a greater good may be gained*, that is, that an option is inevitable in moral life, it is true, as our philosopher preaches, that "no one can be enlightened unless he

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<sup>1</sup> *L'Action*, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ethics*, IV, XLV, note.

be first cleansed or purified and stripped," that "a man must begin by denying himself and willingly forsaking all things for God's sake, and must give up his own will."<sup>1</sup>

Blondel's uncompromising interpretation of sacrifice as a scorn for all the objects of sense and science involves at once by a necessity of logic a consideration of the supernatural. A scorn for all nature may be facilitated by the vivid imagination of the mystic which makes nature black when set against the heavenly radiance; but this explanation of the feat of total self-abnegation is not enough. A man cannot go counter to every natural impulse by force of mere human strength. The act of sacrifice is not then merely arduous and painful; it is, humanly speaking, impossible. Supernatural aid is the necessary postulate of the fact of sacrifice.

What is physically and rationally impossible becomes possible through the supplementation of human strength by a secret infinite power transcendent to nature. There is some out-reaching influence and magnetic power of attraction in pure human devotion which engages the coöperation of energy which seems to the plain observation of the senses to lie beyond the finite sphere. Miraculous aid is obviously required to get done what man cannot do and yet must do, and this miraculous aid answers to the religious frame. The picturing imagination of religion tends to represent the advent of transcendent reinforcement by the figure of a mediating Savior, High Priest, or Advocate; but the symbol under which the fact appears affects but little the import of the teaching. The significant matter is that Blondel asserts the entrance of divinity into human behavior, and frankly describes it as a miraculous event.

Can anything be done to moderate the offensiveness to reason of the supernatural as a religious dogma? The intellectual man is likely to say that if religion implies the supernatural, then religion is nothing to him. The supernatural cannot be rationally demonstrated, graphically exhibited, nor its qualitative content communicated by any normal organ of sensitivity. We must

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<sup>1</sup> W. E. Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, p. 373.

be able to 'think it together' with something that we recognize as valid in our experience in order to acknowledge its existence. Blondel meets this typical attitude of rationalism toward the miraculous by universalizing the marvelous. The irrationality of the act of divine grace in mediating sacrifice becomes increasingly less poignant as reflection more and more discloses the miraculous element in every act. All acts of will involve the same coöperation of power from within and from without human nature that is illustrated in extreme form in total self-abnegation. Still more: nothing that happens is intelligible in isolation; there is a vague reference to a beyond in every conceivable fact and event. "At bottom there is indeed nothing more in the miracle than in the least ordinary fact; at the same time there is nothing less in the most ordinary fact than in the miracle. . . . The divine is not simply inherent in that which seems to go beyond the accustomed power of man and nature, but everywhere, even there where we would like to think that man and nature suffice. Miracles are then miraculous only to those persons who are already disposed to recognize the divine action in the most habitual events and acts. Nature is so ample and diverse that she is everywhere ambiguous; and in striking upon consciousness, she yields the answer that is expected of her."<sup>1</sup>

By thus making the supernatural of one piece with the natural Blondel does service to the religious life. He is not so successful always in showing how this continuity is to be achieved. He asserts it; and that is at least a formal preparation for removing the power of this dogma to stultify the intelligence. But he hardly goes as far as he might in making the fact of miracle transparent to intelligence. The miraculous is actually universal not so much by virtue of its extension over all life, as by virtue of its characteristic presence in life, once and for all, as the transforming power of spirit. As such, the miracle is illustrated by the general ability of science to transfigure nature, the general ability of education to transfigure the child, the general ability of courage to defeat brute force. The wonder-working power of mind, from whatever angle mind be regarded,

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<sup>1</sup> *L'Action*, pp. 396, 7.

whether as abstract reflection, powerful emotion, or concrete institution, is the universal miracle. Blondel tends too much to regard the supernatural as a part of all events taken one by one, and not enough to contemplate the continuity of the marvelous as a single function of mind. But even with this restriction, his insight into its general pervasiveness in existence is a distinct advance over the identification of the miracle with a specifiable number of precise incidents occurring at definable points in time and space.

Reason can point out that the miracle is normal, but only an act, according to Blondel, can prove the actuality of the supernatural so as to confound all doubts. Substantiation is in the plunge. *Fac et videbis*. The speculatively real becomes real to a subject only when he ventures out into the unknown and tests the hypothesis. The materialization of the idea comes through the stroke of will.

Now the act which is the proof and substantiation of faith in the supernatural is not genuinely separate from that faith. Blondel again exhibits the synthesizing power of his thought by insisting that the process of faith and works is a whole, neither one of these means of salvation subsistent or intelligible without the other. It is a partial philosophy which is content with the notion of idea or faith as mere subjective intention: a thought is not yet a thought until it has expressed itself in outward forms. Any comprehensive interpretation of a spiritual situation takes in not only the provocation of the inward sentiment in the outer world, but the return of the sentiment to externality again by expressive movement. What is true of the psychological life in general is true of religious faith in particular. It is not yet fully itself until it has got to itself substance by the performance of suitable acts. "Faith must pour itself through the marrow."<sup>1</sup> In order to become the law of the mem-

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 408.

bers, it must act on the members. Observance of religious forms is not an external appendage to a belief in God or to the desire for the good or whatever may be the inner nucleus of a religious frame of mind. The recasting of sentiment in the detail of practice is part of the essence of sentiment: faith without works is not yet faith; it needs to be domiciled, naturalized, integrated in human action.

So far Blondel interprets the relation of faith and works synthetically. But he is unable utterly to forego his favorite emphasis on the dynamic aspect of mental life; and so from saying that action is necessary to faith he passes over to saying that the action in this case is more important than the faith. He leans backward in his concern to have the rationality of ritual and ceremony recognized. "Sentiments and thought", he says, "are the real externals; the acts are the intimate facts, the facts that reveal the life within and transfigure it."<sup>1</sup> The "dialectician of the inner sentiment" may boast of the abundance of his piety; but the humble adherent of the letter of religion, the simple soul who conforms to the prescribed ritual without understanding its meaning, has more sense of the infinite than the exponent of an abstract faith.

Blondel's exaggeration of the importance of action has to be discounted, but his emphasis on the necessary contribution of every part of the religious life to its total spirit stands. He describes the incarnation of faith technically by calling it the 'letter' or 'commentary' of belief. A reader of Blondel who does not share an almost instinctive identification of the letter or commentary with the ceremonial of corporate Catholicism might well accede to all the general truths on which the present contention rests without understanding why the definite acts specified by the church should be *the acts* through which faith must substantiate itself. The Word must become flesh, surely; the inner must have its outer; a living faith must always express itself; but why is it that the expression should be so arbitrarily determined for

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 409.



a human being? Why may it not be whatever act the individuality of a man's faith or idea at the particular moment of time and in the particular setting of his mental life, prescribes? This question obstinately reappears after the general position of Blondel has been granted.

There is, I think, no fully satisfactory answer to this question, and our philosopher would doubtless himself say that if the question is not asked by an imaginative and sympathetic spirit, it cannot be met. But for those who have ears to hear there is a partial answer—one which justifies the ways of a Catholic to a Catholic even if it does not impose the persuasion of a Catholic upon one outside the communion. Apparently a Catholic is born into his Church in an entirely unique sense; her material aspect is second nature to her sons. Her 'sweet communion, holy ways' are the necessary environment of lofty aspirations in a sense that an outsider can hardly appreciate. From infancy on the Catholic is bred to identify all religious expression with this expression, so that if he is cut off by excommunication from his wonted practices and associations, he feels literally as if his heart were torn from his body. As Sabatier explains: "The Catholic says to God, 'Our Father', but when he speaks of the church he says 'Our Mother'; and it is she whom, from his first glance, he sees leaning over his cradle. . . . The Communion of the Catholic with the church . . . is the initial fact of his moral life. He believes in her as naturally as the new-born babe believes in his mother. The church takes possession of his soul so quickly and entirely that, in his experience, the church and his soul are not merely inseparable, but, in a sense, they have one and the same being. Ignorance of this fundamental fact explains the failure of anti-Catholic propaganda. It is not very difficult to draw individuals or groups of individuals away from all ecclesiastical influence; but so far as I know, the attempt to provide them with a new spiritual milieu has been no more successful than attempts to provide orphan children with a

mother."<sup>1</sup> It would seem then, that for a Catholic the question would hardly arise why, if faith seeks expression, the expression to which he is accustomed should be the type selected. Highly poetic and symbolic, intending universality of application, Catholic ritual lends itself with peculiar readiness to this interpretation of being all the corporate religion there is. When viewed in the light of these considerations, Blondel's interpretation of Catholicism legitimately finds place in a speculative treatment of all life, even if not in a rationalism.

On the whole, Blondel is more successful in his philosophy of religion than in any other aspect of his construction. This is partly accounted for by the fact that a speculative attitude is relatively rare in the treatment of religious questions, and his performance—only partially successful though it is—is nevertheless, by its somewhat exceptional character, the more outstanding. But the chief reason for his greater persuasiveness in this field is that here as in no other connection, he appears to have the requisite intimate experience to be an exponent from the inside. The matter of fact of the devoted life seems to be familiar to him as—for one example—science is not. And yet in one sense it is hardly fair to say that Blondel is more successful in handling religious truth than other truth, since he never intends such a separation, and upon any complete view, the separation is untenable. From the beginning to the end Blondel in-

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Sabatier, *France Today. Its Religious Orientation*, trans. Blinns, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1913, p. 298, note. In illustration of this general thesis Sabatier quotes a very interesting statement from a young Catholic who is replying to a sceptical questioner: "For you, faith is the act whereby the faithful give adhesion to the dogmas defined by the church. But that is only a very small fraction of the reality, and by isolating it one alters and distorts it. Adhesion to dogma is but one of the manifestations of faith. It is an external and, in a way, a juridical sign of it, but is neither its beginning nor its end. For me it is a kind of *joie de vivre*, which finds extraordinary exaltation in communion with the Church. When I sing the *Credo*, and when I kneel to worship the Holy Sacrament, I join myself to the Church with a kind of luxury, with the glorious certitude that without her I should be nothing but a waif: that she has need of me, and that with her my life lays hold of meaning and import." *Ibid.*, pp. 291, 292.

tends to talk about what the total human spirit is and implies, and what the sum and substance of life comes to. He means his philosophy to be religion and his religion to be philosophy.

Since this singleness of purpose pervades his work and characterizes it as much as the diversity of his achievements in various parts, the ultimate estimate of the degree of his success and failure will rest on much the same grounds to whatever part it is applied. We saw in his rendering of both action and intelligence that, while he fundamentally understood these functions to be concrete wholes, he was not able to hold fast to this conception. He sometimes interpreted action as a mysterious force, abstracted from the process of empirical existence, and sometimes interpreted thought as 'dissecting and isolating notionalism.' And so, in a less degree, he sometimes falls short in his exposition of religion. Let the notion of the miraculous cease to offend, he says, for to the discerning the miraculous is the common matter of every-day observation. He thus generalizes it and familiarizes it. But he says that the miraculous element is quite as present in the "least of ordinary facts"<sup>1</sup> as it is anywhere. But it is not *as* present in little things as in great. The universality and therefore the ultimate intelligibility of the supernatural depend on its being considered as a living function more operative at the culmination of heroic effort than in the ordinary occurrence. Universality is not generality; it is pervasive and determinate life. And so with the doctrine of eternal reward and punishment. This doctrine becomes speculative when the infinite consequences of an act are taken qualitatively and not quantitatively—not merely as extending to indefinite distances before and after. Blondel uses the teleological conception in part, but in part he is mechanical in interpretation. The infinite evil that we do when we sin may be represented for him by the algebraic symbol  $\infty$ .<sup>2</sup> And it is almost in a quantitative way that God's atoning act is asserted by Blondel to be the only adequate expiation of an infinitely consequential sin. God's

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<sup>1</sup> *L'Action*, p. 396.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

death is the only fact which measures the same as the sin.<sup>1</sup> It would seem as if Blondel's vision might have carried him more unambiguously on to the idea of the vicarious atonement as an aspect of all life: the aspect which is summed up in the phrase "whether one member suffereth all the members suffer with it." The infinite either of sin or of atonement is not a quasi-spatial concept, but a rich significance. God—anthropomorphizing his nature for the sake of the argument—suffers 'infinitely' for man's sin because his understanding of human nature and his love for his creatures is perfect. He is therefore inward to them both in their sin and in their virtue. Because some of the sin which he appreciates in all its bearings, is absolutely heinous in nature—the ingratitude of the children of Lear, or the treachery of Judas—the infection and suffering of God's nature is perfect at those points. A third example of a defective concreteness in interpretation of dogma is Blondel's generalization of the idea of regeneration as the birth of God in man. The birth of God in man, says Blondel, takes place through man's acts of devotion; for, he says, generation is consummated through the body.<sup>2</sup> There is a movement toward greater intelligibility in thus likening the conversion of the heart to the creation of new physical life. But for a 'synoptic man' the creation of physical life through bodily means is a fragment: the birth of children is the result of the coöperation of two spirits as well as of two bodies. And if some element in the situation must be given a prerogative importance, it is the mental aspect of passion which must be made predominant. Then the concept of the second birth would be like a total act of finite creatures and not a merely bodily act.

The universalization of an idea through extension of reference, which is Blondel's abstract tendency on one side, is the complement of that other tendency to abstraction in his philosophy by which he confuses the individual with the ineffable. What can be understood is understood too frequently by him because it appears everywhere as fact; what cannot be understood

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 371, 372.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 420.

is mysterious because it is underneath, secretly hidden away in the heart of things. God's supernatural power is omnipresent fact; it is also a gift of grace which remains to the end impenetrable and incommunicable. But a concrete reality cannot be represented by the union of these two opposed principles. Only when individuality is apprehended, as it is by Blondel in his best moments, as at the opposite pole from ineffability and as the complexus itself, "resident in the multiplicity of reciprocal relations which unite all things"<sup>1</sup> does he do justice to his original inspiration in calling his philosophy a philosophy of action and a critique of life.

